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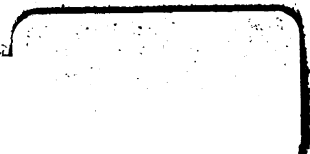
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VERBENA

CAMELLIA STEPHANOTIS

2

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NEW YORK.

BY

WALTER BESANT

AUTHOR OF "ALL SORTS AND CONDITIONS OF MEN"
"ARMOREL OF LYONESSE" ETC.



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P R E F A C E

CONCERNING the stories contained in this volume, I desire to place on record one or two incidents which may serve as a preface.

The second narrative relates the 'Doubts of Dives.' This first appeared in Arrowsmith's well-known series of tales. One evening, soon after its publication, on returning home about five o'clock, I learned that a gentleman, who had refused to give his name, was waiting to see me.

On my entrance, he rose and looked at me with a very odd expression, which I mistook for curiosity. I asked him his name. In reply, he laughed aloud—he laughed in derision, and remarked that this was really too absurd—much too absurd. As a short-sighted man may, and often does, forget faces only half-seen, I supposed that I had met this person somewhere, and had somehow forgotten him. I therefore repeated the question with emphasis; but obtained a similar exasperating reply. He would not believe, I found, that I failed to recognise him. Then I requested him to tell me at once where I had met him and what was his purpose in calling upon me, or else to walk out of the house. He thereupon ceased from scoffing, and proceeded to business.

As for the former question, it appeared, according to his statement, which wanted nothing of directness and clearness, that I was in the frequent habit of meeting him,

although for purposes of my own I now affected to deny the fact. As for his purpose in calling upon me, it was for nothing less than to reproach me with my infamous conduct. Pressed further as to the exact nature of the infamy, he set forth with some detail—say, rather, he reminded me—recalled to my recollection—the very remarkable method by which I had gained possession of the narrative contained in this volume, which I had recently with intolerable impudence passed off—or palmed—upon a credulous public as actually my own.

The gentleman's story is as follows. It is necessary to explain that he is quite sincere and believes every word of it. He says that he was hypnotized. By Me. Through a double door in the Temple. By Me. Reduced to the hypnotic condition—by Me—he was compelled—still by Me—to surrender this story!—his own story, every word of it—called the Doubts of Dives, word for word as it has been published—always by Me.

The verses in it, he says, further, are verses which he himself wrote and has long been accustomed to sing to music of his own composition.

That is his story. What have I got to say in reply? Really, nothing at all. It is a most serious charge, and I have got nothing to say. It also appears—for this is by no means all—that in another story called 'The Bell of St. Paul's,' everything that is good—he says that there is nothing else good in it—was deliberately taken from this gentleman—by Me—whilst in a hypnotic condition, and transferred—by Me—to my poor pages, with the view of lighting them up. Lastly—for there is still more—the very day before he called upon me he says he was hypnotized, on the Metropolitan Railway—always by Me, the great unsuspected and hitherto unknown Pirate-Hypnotizer—and what was taken from him on that occasion the Lord only knows! He himself does not know, and I am sure I

do not. Having thus let me understand that he was fully acquainted with the nefarious and predatory nature of my conduct, and finding me impenitent and stubborn—even to the extent of denying that I possessed any hypnotizing power or experience at all, and of maintaining that I never had tried to hypnotize or to mesmerize anybody—he retired. I still await those legal proceedings with the threat of which he departed.

There is only one point of difference between us. I pronounce the word *Dives* as a dissyllable; he, as a monosyllable, as if it was the third person singular, indicative mood, present tense of the verb ‘to dive.’ ‘I write it *dīves*,’ he said, ‘and I pronounce it *dīves*, and I mean to go on so pronouncing it.’ For this single point of difference—it is, I know, a small thing—I am grateful.

Nor was this all. I received shortly after this event a letter from South Africa signed for surname ‘*Dives*.’ Attracted, the writer said, by the appearance of his own name, he had bought the little book. This was natural curiosity. Imagine, however, the further doubts of Mr. *Dives* when he discovered, on reading the work, that his own chum, Mr. *Pindar*, was also brought into the narrative, and this, though the author has never seen that part of South Africa, and knew nothing about Mr. *Dives* or Mr. *Pindar*!

Concerning the ‘*Demoniac*,’ its purpose is obvious. It is not at all a temperance story—it is the story of a disease so strange as to seem like the possession of an evil spirit: it is incurable: it seizes a man and it holds him until he dies. The only possible escape for him is in total abstinence from the beginning. Later on, that escape becomes impossible. It is a strong subject, and to those who turn away with a shudder from anything stronger than a sipper or a kiss, it has proved a repellant story. Its appearance produced a shower of letters, some witnessing from their own most sorrowful

experience to the truth of the picture, some abusing the author for drawing so gloomy a picture, some remonstrating, some conveying approbation and thanks. One lady wrote to lament that I had destroyed her only hope; her husband, she said, had destroyed his own fortune and his health; had ruined her life as well as his own; had saddened and disgraced his children: but she had nourished one hope—that he would yet reform. Alas, poor lady! the only reply was that her husband was only a common drunkard; not, like George Atheling, possessed of an evil spirit. The common drunkard may reform. There is still hope for that lady—for the Demoniac, none. I have only to add that I took counsel, during the progress of the history, with a young scholar, learned in medicine, and that he kept the scientific part of it right for me, for which I thank him most gratefully.

I have to acknowledge, also, my obligations to my friend Mr. Charles Brookfield, who suggested the *motif* of the story 'Verbena Camellia Stephanotis.'

W. B

UNITED UNIVERSITY CLUB,
April 3, 1892.

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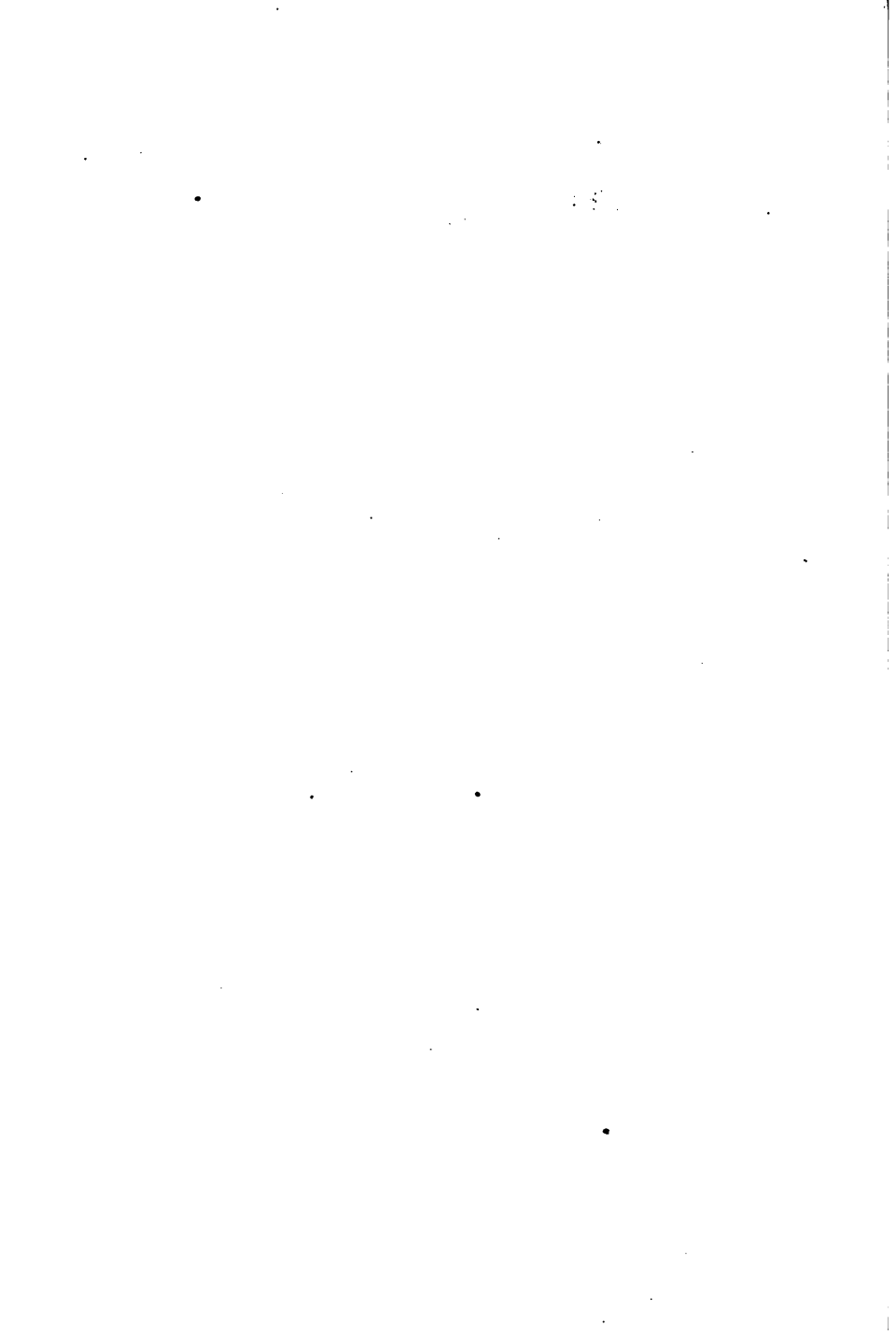
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VERBENA CAMELLIA STEPHANOTIS

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VERBENA CAMELLIA STEPHANOTIS

I

THEN the Priest, as the Rubric directs, took the child in his own hands, holding it dexterously, and not like a prentice, or mere curate, unaccustomed to the right handling of a baby, but with a circular sweep of the left, so that the head of the infant lay nestled in the bend of the arm, and the body was supported by the hand, and the right hand was free to administer the healing waters of the font, and he said to the child's sponsors, who were her earthly father and her earthly mother, with Aunt Eliza :

' Name this child.'

To which the godfather, also the father, replied in a clear and intelligible voice: 'Verbena Camellia Stephanotis.' He was a short man, with stooping shoulders, a broad forehead, and meditative eyes. When he had done this part of his duty, knowing that the clerk, as is usual in such cases, would do all the rest, his eyes departed from the situation, and went right through the church walls into some far distant place. In reality, they were looking into his fernery, which was under glass about a mile and a half away.

Now, the Priest was a masterful man, who scrupled not to restrain the unbridled sponsor by authority of the Church. Once, for instance, he refused to christen a child Judas Iscariot, even though his father was a professed total unbeliever, and therefore expected every allowance. On this occasion, also, he perceived that the proposed names were professional. He, therefore, changed the name by his own

authority, and without asking the godfather's consent, to Vera Camilla. He entered these names in the book, and showed them to the parents.

'It doesn't matter,' said the father; 'I shall call her what I please.' In the end he never called her anything at all.

'Vera Camilla,' said her mother. 'It's sweetly genteel.'

'Vera,' said Aunt Eliza. 'Why, it's a name fit for any lady! Verbenar, indeed! You might as well have called the dear child Ollyock.'

II.

VERA lived in the loveliest cottage ever seen—a cottage such as is sometimes provided for young lovers by a fairy—it seemed to be of one story, but there were really two small bedrooms in the two gables; they had sloping sides, and just room enough for a bed and a chair and a looking-glass. The cottage was covered all over with climbing plants up to the very chimney; Virginia creeper, wisteria, clematis, jessamine occupied each its own side or corner; a passion flower held possession of the porch; the lawn before the cottage was trim and neat—mown and rolled till it was as soft as velvet, and as smooth as silk. There were beds in which every kind of flower grew and flourished; and in the background there were flowering shrubs, which blossomed, one or other, all the long year round.

The household consisted of the girl and her father; her mother now lying not far off. The father, always a meditative man, was entirely absorbed in his profession, and talked of nothing but his plants. He spoke of them as a school-master speaks of his pupils. He recognised promise, but experience taught him to look for disappointment. He knew the temptations and the dangers which beset the vegetable kingdom; their manners and customs, the failings and weaknesses of his plants. Of these things he spoke, and he was unable to speak or to think of anything beside. Did his daughter want anything? What should she want, living in a most beautiful and spacious garden, planted with every tree, shrub, and flower that will flourish under the sky in

Northern London? All day long he was engaged with his flowers; in the evening he went to his club at the tavern. His daughter, therefore, saw him only at meals, where he mostly took his food in silence.

The cottage looked out upon the lawn, and therefore commanded a view of the great iron gates on the left, and in front the broad gravel road which led to the Ground, and on the right the Ground itself—not a park, or a play-ground, or a place of recreation—but the Ground. During the hours when the Ground was used, the girl always sat with her back to the window, as though the view displeased her. She had very early contracted this habit, and now continued it, though she no longer felt the least dislike to the view from the window, or to the panorama of those who marched past in order to use the Ground.

The iron gates opened upon the high-road, now deserted, though in the old days it had been day and night covered with carts, waggons, stage coaches, carriages, and droves of cattle. Now the tramp limped painfully along, or the young London clerk, on Saturday afternoon and Sunday, rolled swiftly along upon his bicycle. Otherwise the road was deserted save for those who drove (for nobody walked) to the Ground.

About ten o'clock in the morning the business and activity of the day began, and continued without pause until the afternoon, when it stopped. At five o'clock the gates were closed. Then Vera had the Ground all to herself.

The business of the day began, and continued, with a procession. Sometimes it was a procession of many vehicles, but generally of no more than three. First, there came an Ark with a treasure chest in it, and that so precious that it was covered all over with flowers. Next two carriages followed, drawn by black horses, and filled with people, who sat bolt upright when anybody was looking, and stuck out their chins with pride at their own respectability. The procession testified to the Family greatness. It is not often that the Family, which is for the most part an invisible unit, can illustrate its own greatness—in fact, this is nearly the only function which can serve that purpose. The procession entered the gates, and drove slowly past the cottage, where the occupants of the carriages were often disappointed at seeing not the face, but the back and the shoulders of a

girl. That anyone should have so little curiosity as not to turn round and estimate the respectability of a Family!

The carriages rolled on; they stopped before a small building, where ceremonies were conducted. When these were finished the people came away, but without their treasure. They came away, got into the carriages, and drove away briskly. Not far from the iron gates is the tavern known as the 'Fox and Grapes': here there is a large room, with a comfortable fire, for the reception of visitors. The tavern is famous, to those who use the Ground, for the most sympathetic of all drinks. It is unsweetened, except with lump sugar, according to taste, and is taken with hot water.

All the morning long one procession followed another. They were all exactly alike, except that sometimes there was a longer following of carriages. Vera heard them pass, but she never looked round.

The Ground, in fact, was a cemetery in the West Finchley Road, the cemetery of a great London parish; a large park, covering many acres, laid out in flower-beds, lawns, gravelled walks, trees and shrubs, so that in spring, summer, and autumn it is a very lovely garden; and even in winter it is not without its beauty. Among the flower-beds and the shrubs lie in rows—row after row, miles of rows—the graves of the dead. Most of them have headstones; many have broken pillars, crosses, square tombs, polished granite slabs, little columns planted with flowers. There were legends and epitaphs on these monuments. There is a certain monotony about the epitaphs of London cemeteries. Mostly, to those who read between the lines, they run as follows:

'Sacred to the memory of A. B., who lived seventy years and did nothing worthy of remembrance. He was a sincere and consistent Christian, always horribly afraid of going to Heaven, and quite certain that no one would send him anywhere else. He thought of nothing but money, and he made a little, but not what he had a right to expect. He carried on his affairs to the end without being publicly disgraced. Every Sunday morning he went to church, and during the rest of the day he feasted. His family, who quarrelled over the division, speak of him no longer, and when his children die he will be as much forgotten as any Early Briton. This stone is erected to the perpetuation of his imperishable memory.'

The population of the place, although the Ground has only been opened for thirty years, is a quarter of a million.

The Ground does not belong to a parish where men of letters, art, or science live; and there is not one of all this immense multitude whose works survive to continue his name for another generation.

When the processions of the day were over, the great gates closed, the chapel locked, and the *Croquemorts* gone, Vera had the place to herself, and could wander about the paths. She knew every part of the cemetery; in one corner the little bit of coppice left uncleared, in another the two or three apple-trees still remaining—remnant of an orchard; the part of the Ground not yet laid out, covered with long bents and darnel and coarse grass, and the hedge beyond this field where she gathered blackberries in autumn, and roses and honeysuckle in June.

She wandered alone about the great silent place in the summer evenings. Long after the sun went down her white figure among the white tombs shone ghostly in the twilight.

She never went anywhere; her life was wholly spent within these walls. Half a mile up the road there was a school where she had learned certain accomplishments which were of little use to her because she seldom read anything and never wrote. She made no friends: there is a certain prejudice attached to one resident in a cemetery; it is awkward to give a cemetery as your permanent address—some little odium attaches to any office connected with such an institution. Vera, therefore, had no friends. Other girls go about and see things, they have amusements; Vera went nowhere. Other girls, again, get a little excitement and change when they put on their best clothes and go to church. Vera did not go to church. The reason was, not that superiority of intellect which shuts the church door to so many young ladies of the day, but simply because her father considered that, when you have church and chapel services going on every day, the necessities of the human case are more than met. Between the time when Vera left school, and the beginning of this history, a period of two years passed away. That is to say, for two years the girl lived at the gates of the cemetery, and went nowhere else except to the row of suburban shops near the school, where she bought the things wanted for her housekeeping.

To a girl, almost a child, living thus alone among the

tombs, with burials going on all day long, with no friends, no outside world except a long deserted road, life may come to seem like an endless *Danse Macabre*—a dance of death, a pageant of death. To this place, hither, must all be brought; it is the universal end. What was the outside world engaged upon all the time? Clearly, she concluded, undertakery. Some made coffins; some coffin-plates, handles, ornaments, linings, shrouds; some made black carriages; some black coats, and black frocks; some were told off to read the service appointed; the head undertaker was the Chief Minister of State; nothing was regarded but the future occupation of the Ground; the chief object in saving money, was to provide for a respectable procession. Life was all death; clothes, nothing but a sign of mourning; clergymen, chaplains to cemeteries; religion, an assurance to the bereft; everything beautiful was intended for nothing but the adornment of the permanent home.

I do not say that Vera put all these thoughts into words—young girls do not formulate their thoughts; language cannot clothe them—but they assumed this colour and complexion. The cemetery was all she really knew. Perhaps, because everybody who came to the ground was clothed in black, Vera, with a kind of instinct rather than by protest, dressed always in white. No one would have interfered with her if she had chosen yellow, but she chose white. Black belonged to the processions. Black belonged to the ladies who came afterwards, sometimes for as much as six months later, with flowers. The black spots moving about among the green graves and the flower-beds in this beautiful garden offended the girl's eyes. Therefore, she wore white; in winter white flannel, and in summer white stuff. She carried a basket, and a pair of garden scissors, and she went about attending to the flowers of the forgotten graves, those for which there were no longer any mourners to pay the gardener. She was a tall, thin slip of a girl, about sixteen years of age, as yet with little of the womanly figure; her fair hair abundant hung unconfined except by a ribbon; her blue eyes were large and serious; her face was grave; her very step was serious; she neither laughed nor sang, nor danced as she went along, although she was so young—you see, it checks laughter and singing to remember that, though a quarter of a million may be listening,

they cannot reply even with an echo. I read once of a child brought up in a nunnery—one of the austere houses where the sisters dig their own graves, and where the days are for ever cheered by the sound of the knell of the passing-bell. Then I remembered Vera. As that cloister child, so was Vera.

III.

THE ties of kinship are less respected on certain social levels than on others. The English family very easily breaks up into separate pieces: brothers and sisters go their own way, they scatter; if they remain in the same place they quarrel; children who should be cousins know each other no longer; those who get up in the world are too proud to inquire after those who remain down below; those who are below are too proud to intrude upon those who are up. Family pride, therefore, has its uses. Vera's father, for instance, remained head gardener of the new cemetery. His brother, though this he did not know, because he never read any newspapers, was Prime Minister of New South Wales; another brother, also unknown to him, was a Silver King, and controlled I know not what. He remained. Had he gone abroad, as his brothers did, he would have become Botanist to a Colony; Professor of Botany in some Colonial University; Fellow of the Royal Society. As it was, he remained at home, and was a gardener whose thoughts never travelled beyond his plants.

But even at home one may rise. Vera had an aunt—her mother's sister—her Aunt Eliza. She, by reason of her husband's great success, had climbed to a dizzy height, even to a house in Bedford Square, and a carriage. Aunt Eliza's husband, indeed, was none other than a certain well-known, far-famous purveyor in the City. It would be hard, indeed, if so eminent a citizen should not have his carriage, and his house in Bedford Square beautifully furnished, and on Sundays his dinner-parties at three in the afternoon. But Aunt Eliza had well-nigh forgotten the existence of her niece. Her sister was dead; her sister's husband was gardener to a cemetery; there was a child. Prosperity makes one acquainted with other prosperous persons; people who have a good concern in the City cannot remain

on intimate terms with cemetery gardeners. Do not blame Aunt Eliza; 'tis the way of the world. She had not called at the lodge for fourteen years.

One day, in leafy May, the laburnum and the lilacs being in full flower, there entered the gates a procession of great length and magnificence, with such waving plumes and such a pile of flowers as denoted respect to success. Evidently a prince in Israel. Vera, sitting in her room with her back to the window, was conscious only of prolonged blackness grating over the gravel.

When everything was over, and the mourners were returning to their carriages, one of them, a portly dame of benevolent aspect, walking beside her husband—'twas he of the great provision shop—whispered: 'John, I must stay behind and see him, if it's only for poor Amelia's sake. Tell them I am staying to see the grave of a friend. You go on, and I will get home by myself, somehow.'

When the last carriage had passed through the gates, Aunt Eliza opened the door of the lodge.

'Goodness gracious!' she cried, 'I suppose you're Vera? Lord! how you're grown! A young woman, I declare; and a pretty one, too! Give me a kiss, my dear. I'm your aunt Eliza, come for a funeral! Well, to be sure! Why, it's a pretty room and all, though, of course, one wouldn't expect to find you sitting on a coffin-lid. And where's your father, my dear?'

When at last she went away, she held out both hands, and kissed her niece kindly.

'My dear,' she said, 'it's perfectly dreadful to think of a child like you—a big girl, too—sitting among the tombs all the while, like as if you were possessed, seeing nobody, and talking to nobody, and going nowhere. It's enough to make one melancholy mad! You shall come to see us. John and me will make you welcome. Look here, now, Vera, my dear—I remember when your father wanted to call you Sweet William, or some such name—you come next Saturday afternoon. Come early, and I'll get you some pretty things to wear, though white is always becoming, I will say that. In the evening we'll go to the theatre, and see my favourite, Nina Cazalet; Sunday morning, if it's fine, we always drive out. There's open house for dinner, and the rest of the day spent with such laughing and talk-

ing as you never heard. Ugh !' she shuddered ; ' you *can't* laugh in a cemetery. That's right, you'll come. Don't let on about the Ground, you know. In a year or two, perhaps, when the young man comes along, you can break it gently. That's settled, then, and I'm glad I came—truly glad I am.'

IV.

A PLACE filled with people ; the women in lovely dresses, smiling and talking, the men as animated and as happy as custom permits. Bright light everywhere ; a band playing sweet music ; a curtain painted with girls and young men ; flowers, dances, and sunshine ; the air charged with the perfume of joy and youth. Vera sat beside her aunt in the front row of the dress-circle, her eyes wide open, her lips trembling, her hands trembling, her whole frame tingling with the wonder and the novelty of it.

Then the curtain drew up, and for three hours Vera was ravished away. The theatre existed no longer ; she was not sitting before a stage ; she was looking on, unseen, at fairy-land. She saw, for the first time, youth and the happiness of youth ; the joy of being beautiful, the joy of being loved, the joy of living and wooing, the joy of sunshine, the joy of life ; for the first time she felt that yearning for joys unattainable which glorifies youth, though it too often makes that time unhappy. She heard the gospel of joy. When the house laughed she felt as if something jarred. It was as if she was recalled rudely to the actual world. The bell would be tolling next. She looked on gravely, wondering. When the curtain fell between the acts she sighed and gasped, and the tears came into her eyes. When her aunt spoke to her, she replied faintly, because her mind was with the play.

Among the company was an actress who took the leading part. To this girl she seemed like a being of whose existence she had never even dreamed. She was young, she was beautiful : she had a sweet face and a sweet voice, her lips were always smiling, her eyes beamed with happiness and with mirth ; in the play all the men loved her and courted her, in the house the young men clapped their hands for joy whenever she appeared. She was the Queen, the Goddess,

profession. Give up the stage or give up the lover.' A dreadful alternative. She would have been happy with both, but with one only of the two she would be wretched. How could she give up her lover? how could she give up her art? 'Choose,' said her lover; 'I will await your choice.'

'Something dreadful is going to happen,' she said to her dresser. 'Last night I had terrible dreams. I've had this letter for three days, and every time I try to answer it I am held back. I cannot answer it. A cruel letter! What has made him write it?'

'Don't think about it till the piece is over.'

'No—not till the piece is over.' Nina sat upright and nerved herself. 'I've had such a frightful headache all day long—I can hardly drag my limbs. But I shall manage, somehow. Oh!' she started nervously, 'who is that knocking at the door?'

It was something tied up in silver paper. Nina tore it off impatiently.

'Always the same,' she said. 'Every Saturday for the last two months. Who is Vera, I wonder?' She opened the note. 'Always the same words: "I love you. If you will let me love you, wear these flowers." They are beautiful flowers. Who is Vera?' She sat up and looked at the writing. The characters were square, and almost childish.

'Mysterious Vera! I am haunted by her. Well, I will find out who she is. Out of curiosity I will wear her flowers to-night. Let her love me? Well, there are not many women who want to love me. As for the men—— Put the flowers here—they are very pretty.'

The toilette was finished. The orchestra played the last bars, the bell rang, the curtain rose up; the actress, with glowing cheeks, smiling lips, and bright eyes, ran upon the stage, while the house rang with cheers. Oh! who could hope to be as happy and as careless as this godlike creature? She carried away all who sat in that great house—all, even the poor dressmakers' drudges in the gallery were rapt and ravished out of themselves, and for three short hours lived in a paradise of song and happiness and merry carelessness. A witch! a sorceress! But a white witch, a benevolent, kindly witch, who used her power for the happiness of the world.

When she appeared upon the stage the young men gasped and drew their breath, and many changed colour, being victims of Love the mocker, who fills young men's hearts with yearning for the unattainable. And the girls all murmured 'Oh!' with a long sigh of admiration and of envy. In the front row of the pit there sat a young girl. She, at the sight of Nina, turned first red and then pale. She was quite alone, which is unusual in the pit—or any other part of the house—even for older girls. She rose, and asked those behind her kindly to make room. She passed out, and did not return.

It was half-past eleven when Nina drove home. She lived alone, save for her maid and her servants, and had a first-floor flat in Victoria Street. Her evening's work had been too much for her; she climbed the stair with difficulty, dragging her limbs, and leaning on the balustrade; her head reeled; her eyes ached.

She opened her door and went into her dining-room. The supper was laid; the lamp burned low; the windows were wide open for the warm air of July; the lamps of the street lighted the room. At the open window sat a figure dressed in white. When Nina entered, the figure rose. It was a girl. Nina saw that she was very young, and that her eyes were beautiful.

'My dear,' she said, surprised, 'who are you?' And what are you doing in my room? 'Unless'—her eyes wandered—'unless you are a ghost.'

'I am Vera,' said the girl.

'You are Vera! Who is Vera? Oh! I remember.'

'You wore my flowers—you will let me love you. Oh!'—the girl caught her hand and kissed it—'you are so lovely! you are so happy! I have never seen anyone so happy.'

Nina reeled and caught the back of a chair.

'This is some dream,' she said. 'I am in a delirium. I, happy? And with this letter in my pocket? You are come to mock me.'

She caught her burning forehead with her hands, and sank senseless on the floor. The fever which had been hovering about her all day long seized her in its strong clutch and held her fast, so that for three long weeks she knew nothing.

The papers next day announced, with great concern, that Miss Cazalet was taken ill with some kind of fever. Everybody began to talk about the bad ventilation and the smells of the theatre. Next day, and for many days afterwards, the street was blocked with the carriages of those who came to inquire after the actress. They drove and they walked; they left cards, or they humbly took an answer and walked away. Most of them brought flowers; Covent Garden was cleared out every morning; the Parcel Post brought boxes of flowers from all parts of the country; there were flowers enough to furnish the weapons for a carnival. But the recipient of all this sympathy lay unconscious on her bed, revealing to her nurse all the secrets of her heart.

What the papers did not know was that, by the happiest accident in the world, Miss Nina Cazalet had obtained the services of a nurse more devoted, more watchful, more jealous, than even the most scientific sister in the most difficult case of the most dangerous ward. For Vera stayed.

VI.

'I don't believe you care a straw what becomes of Vera,' said Aunt Eliza. 'What? She stays away for three weeks, and you never so much as ask where she is.'

'I thought she was with you,' replied the head gardener.

'Nothing of the kind.'

'Where is she, then?'

'Staying with an actress. How she got to know her—however she came to think of it—how in the world—but there's no sounding the artfulness of a girl.'

'An actress?'

'Oh, the girl's in good hands; I will say that. An actress, I said. 'Tis none other than Miss Nina Cazalet herself. I've been to the house; she lives in a most beautiful flat. The furniture is finicking; but, then, you can't expect actresses to furnish like plain folk. Finicking, but pretty. The girl came out to see me. Nina Cazalet was ill, and Vera is nursing her. She was very short with me when I wanted to know how she got there; but never mind, some day she'll tell me. Well, now, I asked her what salary she was to have. Nothing at all. Then I asked her

where she took her meals. If she'd lived with the servants I would have carried her off there and then, I would. But she doesn't. Boards, I understand, with the family; treated like them, has what the others have, diet unlimited, and so far as I could learn, pudding every day. When Nina Cazalet gets better I shall go and have it out with her. Meantime, I think Vera's a lucky girl, and you ought to be thankful, little as you care.'

'The girl,' said the gardener, 'is living with the family; and there's pudding every day. Of course, a growing girl requires pudding; stimulates the growth, like a little made earth. She's safe, and in good hands. In that case——' His eyes went out into space again.

VII.

THE only man in all London, not counting those who never go to West End theatres, who did not know that Nina Cazalet was ill, was the very same young man who had written that letter. Why had he written it? Why do young men ever write cruel letters to young ladies? It is the inexorable pater. When the pater is poor, the young man does what he likes without the formality of asking permission; nor does the pater who has nothing to leave expect to be asked. Both are happy, therefore, and should bless their poverty. This young man, unfortunately, had a pater who was rich, and, moreover, had absolute power over his money, which had been 'made.' Oh, the ingenuity of man which makes money, securities, shares, banknotes, gold, silver and bronze out of nothing—just nothing at all! See him in youth—naked, his hands empty. See him again fifty years later, laden with the money he has made. What feat of jugglery, what marvel of science, can compare with this transformation of nothing into everything?

'My son,' said pater the maker, 'I hear nothing but good of this girl. I shall not oppose your marriage, because there is no nonsense in your case about marrying beneath you. Yet, with your prospects, you might have made a beginning of family connection. I make only one condition: that she gives up the stage. I can't have a daughter-in-law acting every night. I am sure you will acknowledge that I am

reasonable. If you marry her without, you will be placed in the ignoble condition of one who lives upon his wife's earnings.'

Therefore the young man wrote that letter. He put it as kindly as he could, but he put it plainly, thinking, in his folly, that he had asked a small thing. And he had as yet received no answer. Had he looked at the papers he would have read that his mistress was ill; had he gone to the club he would have heard the news. But he did neither. He sat in his private room in a Bond Street Hotel waiting for a letter which came not; he roamed the street, melancholy, asking himself why he had been such a fool as to expect that such a girl could possibly prefer such a man as himself, and such a humdrum life as he had to offer her, to the excitement of the stage and the practice of her art. Young men often ask themselves such questions; but the reply is never satisfactory. Why was I such a fool? Echo replies, 'Such a fool.' How could I have been such an ass? Another echo, 'Such an ass.' No; it is never a satisfactory reply.

'A young lady, sir, wishes to see you.' The waiter made this announcement. 'Won't send up her name, sir.'

'A young lady? No name?'

'Quite young, sir. Child, almost. Says you must see her.'

'Well, let her come up then.'

A girl dressed all in white stood in the doorway looking curiously at him. Quite a young girl, tall and angular, long fair hair falling down her back; big blue eyes. And she gazed upon him, standing there, while you might have counted ten.

'I am afraid,' said the youth, 'that I do not recollect—'

'No, you have never seen me before.'

'Why do you look at me so curiously then?'

'I was wondering as I came along what kind of man you were. Because either you must be the best man that ever lived for her to love you, or it is a great condescension on her part—and perhaps a great pity and shame and her friends ought to interfere,' she added, without so much as a comma.

'But who are you?'

'I can see from your face that it isn't for your cleverness that she loves you.'

'Who loves me?'

'And the letter in my pocket proves that it isn't for your goodness, for only a foolish or a bad young man could write such a letter.'

The young man changed colour. Then he threw himself into a chair.

'Well,' he said, 'I suppose you will tell me presently who you are and what you want.'

'A man who was not foolish, and was good when such a lady as Nina——'

'As Nina!' He sprang to his feet. 'You come from Nina?'

'When such a lady condescended to love him, would be so much honoured that he would ask for her conditions and not lay down his own. Oh, to make her happy who every evening makes hundreds of people happy, and sends them home full of lovely thoughts, ought to be happiness enough for any man. But you—oh! you!—you dare to make conditions. A great genius is in love with you, and you order her to give up her work. You pretend to love her, and you——' Here Vera's eyes overflowed, and her voice choked.

'You come from Nina? Tell me, have you a message—a letter—from her? Who are you?'

'My name is Vera; but you do not know me. I am staying with Nina. I am never going to leave her, whatever happens. Never, mind, never.'

She spoke with great firmness and resolution. The young man gazed at her bewildered.

'Nina is ill,' she went on.

'Nina? Ill?'

'She has been ill for three weeks. All the time she has been off her head, and has been talking about you. That is why I have come here.'

'Nina? Ill?'

'She has come to herself again, and she has left off talking about you; that was the first sign by which we knew——'

'Nina? Ill?'

'And I've come about that letter of yours. Here it is. I've borrowed it, but I must take it back.'

‘What am I to do?’

‘Do you want to make her get well, or would you rather kill her? Well, then, sit down and write her another letter.’

‘What am I to say?’

‘You are to say you withdraw this letter, and that you are truly sorry and ashamed for writing it, and that you humbly beg her pardon for insulting her with such a condition, and hope she will forgive you. I wouldn’t, if I were Nina; but perhaps she will, because she is a great deal better than all other women put together.’

He sat down obediently, his face flushed, his hands trembling. He wrote rapidly, covering the four pages.

‘There,’ he said, ‘give her that. Tell her—tell her if my life would be of any help to her, I would give her that.’

Vera read the letter without asking permission. Since it concerned Nina’s health and happiness, why not?

‘Thank you,’ she said. ‘It looks as if you were really sorry; of course, you ought to be. I dare say she will forgive you, and let you come and see her. I will write to you.’

‘No—no; I will call—I will call this afternoon. I shall be able to see you, at least.’

Vera turned to go.

‘Stay!’ he cried; ‘you think I have been a brute.’

‘I do,’ she replied, with the candour of an unspoiled soul.

‘You don’t understand. I have nothing in the world except my allowance from my father, who is rich. I have no profession, and no way of making money. He allows me to marry Nina only on the condition that she leaves the stage. If she does not, he will disinherit me.’

‘Is that all?’ asked Vera the unworldly. ‘You would rather keep the money than Nina? What a lover!’

I know not where she got her experience or theory of love, but this is what she said, with fine contempt in her eyes.

‘Again you don’t understand. I should then be in the despicable position of a man who lives upon his wife.’

‘Why? Are you too proud to do something? I would mow the lawns and sweep up the leaves rather than do nothing.’

‘I am not too proud; I am only too ignorant.’

‘Would you like to be an under-gardener?’ asked Vera, thinking of her own possible patronage.

He shook his head.

‘What can you do?’

‘I can do many things, but nothing that I can make into money. I can shoot, I can fish, I can play games, I can ride—’

A happy thought—nay, an inspiration—flashed across the girl’s mind. She had often seen a cavalcade ride along the road—a troop of half a dozen girls with one man, riding. He was their teacher.

‘Why don’t you become a riding-master?’

‘Eh?’ The young man started. ‘Why not? I could teach riding. I will. I cannot live upon Nina’s salary. Tell her, child, that her husband must be independent. Tell her that if she can stoop to a riding-master—’

‘I will tell her,’ said Vera.

VIII.

A FORTNIGHT later Nina lay on a couch beside the window. She was dressed—she was rapidly getting better. People had left off calling; there were no more bulletins; the procession of flowers had ceased to encumber the adjacent roads. She was better, and she was going to take a long summer’s rest at the seaside. At her feet, in a low chair, sat Vera, gravely watching in case she might want anything.

‘Child,’ said Nina, who had been silent, ‘he came here this morning while you were out. Nobody could be kinder. He is quite fixed about becoming a riding-master.’

‘You laughed again yesterday afternoon,’ said Vera. ‘I heard you.’

‘Did we laugh? You thought I was never going to laugh any more. What can I do for you, Vera? Oh, my dear child! what can I do for you, who have done so much for me? You dragged me back from the jaws of death; you have given me life again—and my lover again. What can I give you?’

‘Why,’ said Vera, ‘you first showed me what happiness means.’

'I will play to you, dear.' She rose, and went to the piano. 'When I am very, very happy—quite happy—I don't want to talk or to laugh, but to play soft music. People only laugh and make merry, because they want to be happy. It is a sign. Old people do not laugh, because there is no more happiness to be hoped; and happy people never laugh, because they have got all they want. Let me play to you.'

She played for a quarter of an hour, softly. Then she began to talk while she played.

'I shall be so happy that laughing and singing will become a burden to me. They are the prelude, you know—only the prelude—like the overture to the play. That is why, when you first knew me, you were so attracted. You were made to expect something, which excited and pleased you. There is only one kind of happiness in the world, and I have it—thanks to you, Vera, thanks to you!'

She turned her music-stool, and held out her arms.

'Child! You are nothing but a bag of bones and big blue eyes. That is because you have spent yourself in saving me. Now I shall make you grow fat and strong. Vera——'

'Well, Nina?'

'You have told me everything—all about your father and your aunt, who is a dear, good soul; but there is one thing you have never told me—where did you get all those beautiful flowers?'

Vera shuddered. Three weeks before she would not have shuddered.

'I took them all,' she said, 'from the new-made graves.'

THE DOUBTS OF DIVES

CHAPTER I.

THE LAMENT OF DIVES.

‘Is it really five years, Kit, since last we met? I suppose it may be so long; but I have left off counting Time.’

‘Why should you count Time, dear Dives? You have only to enjoy all the time there is. You can make the most of every moment. When it is finished you can live in the next. For the rich, time crawls. It is by those who work that Time must be counted, because in the space he allows to them they must make their money. This is the reason why, to some of us, he flies, he gallops. Lord! how short is the day when it is spent in work! What says the song, my own song?

“Life is long—for those who toil not;
Only long—for those who play.”

There were two young men sitting in a set of Chambers. The place was simple Pall Mall: the time was two. in the afternoon: the season was June. The day was very hot—everybody remembers the great heats of June in that present year of grace: the windows were thrown open for the air, and from the street below came up the continual rolling of the cabs and the tread of many feet.

They had been lunching together; the table was not yet cleared, but they had left it: one of the two had taken the largest and easiest chair in the room, and was now curled up in it with every outward indication of complete physical

comfort. The other was standing at the empty fireplace, leaning against the mantel-shelf.

The young man leaning against the mantel-shelf was he who had left off counting Time. He was the tenant of the Chambers—Denis Stirling by name—and he should have been distinctly, even enviably, good-looking. In fact, he was possessed of regular features, good eyes, light hair, and comely limbs; but his handsome face was marred by a cloud of chronic discontent, and his speech by a weariness which was not at all like the Nineteenth Century Lassitude of which we used to hear so much and now hear nothing. That has gone: it has retired into the Limbo of old Fashions, Fads, Hobbies, Affectations, and Pretences by which small souls seek to seem great. This weariness was not, with Denny Stirling, an affectation at all; profound discontent really possessed his soul. A young gentleman ought not to be always grumpy, particularly a young gentleman who has everything that, in the opinion of other young men, ought to remove grumpiness. It is, indeed, a condition of mind which sits ill upon all youth, even on the very stonebroke. In the days, not long ago, when young men of superior intellect and the Higher Culture showed, by an air of melancholy, the burden laid upon them by the mere presence of the uncultured, they all with one consent avoided grumpiness. One could stand apart, chin in air: one could be melancholy in falsetto: one could sprawl; but one could not be grumpy.

The other young man, he who lay low in the easy-chair and purred with mere physical ease and comfort, was in figure stout, even round: in complexion ruddy: he had short brown hair: his nose was broad; this is always an excellent sign in man, and betokens good fellowship: his eyes, which were protected by spectacles—not a pince-nez, but plain outspoken spectacles—gleamed behind those ornaments like unto the big Fiji cats' eyes: quite ordinary observers would have remarked that there lay in his eyes the light which poets call the twinkle, likening it unto the flickering of the stars. This is happily not uncommon among us. Cranks, faddists, hystericals, advocates of women's suffrage, and those who think to make the world wise and good by Acts of Parliament, cannot possibly have

it. Nature denies it to them. Bishops, however, are sometimes endowed with the twinkle: and I have known Editors of comic papers to lack it. One can imagine a Pope with a twinkle; but not the President of the United States. The Irish vote forbids it. The name of this young man was Cotterel, and as, of his two Christian names, the one of which he was the less proud was Christopher, of course his friends always called him Kit.

He sat up in his chair and poured out another glass of Champagne, which he held up to the light, murmuring softly, as if to himself, 'I love these beads, that rise out of nothing and bubble on the surface. They mean joy and idleness. Why cannot we always be idle and happy? Dives, you are idle, you should be happy. There is froth upon the tankard: there are bubbles in the soda; but they are not the beads of the French vintage.'

'Kit,' said the other impatiently, 'you talk as if you were still an undergraduate. How *can* a man of your age sing the praises of Champagne?'

'In the matter of Champagne I am always an undergraduate. Denny, it was a happy chance that threw us together again to-day. The world is so big that we might never have met. Yet it is so small, especially at this end of it, that one is always meeting somebody. This is the narrow end—your end—the fat and toothsome end—where Champagne flows from all the aqueducts. My end is the Fleet Street end, which is lean and thirsty, and given to a cheap drink made, I am told, of an infusion of malt.'

I give notice that those people who believe that what is called the Supernatural requires, even for its most remarkable developments, anything beyond the most commonplace surroundings, had better read no farther, unless, which is too seldom the case, they are prepared on the spot to change their convictions. As everybody knows, who has read the recent works of the more advanced thinkers, it is no longer the romantic surrounding that is wanted. Things most remarkable now take place daily under the most commonplace conditions. Things most unexpected are now developed in simple drawing-rooms—nay, one is told, in rooms of clubs. We no longer look to the Moated Grange,

the Ruined Abbey, the Deserted Churchyard, for spirits and their companions of the silent world. They come to us in our own houses and in broad daylight. It is, after all, only a return to the good old times. The Jinn was wont to sit upon the bare rocks by the sea-shore in the open day, rejoicing in the sun : he visited the fisherman in his hut at noontide : in the cool of the afternoon he walked, for all the world to see, under the shade of the trees in the Caliph's garden. It is therefore no new thing that the Other World should call, so to speak, upon the World of London. Is not the West End as good as Thibet? Why should Arabia the Happy be preferred to Kensington the Comfortable?

No historian before myself has discovered that these condescensions or advances, these offers of familiarity on the part of the Other World, occur regularly at intervals of about a hundred years, and always towards the close of a century. Amazing things are recorded of Alchemists, at the end of the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries. Again, at the great awakening of a hundred years ago there appeared prophets, clairvoyants, and mesmerists. At the present day, there are those who annihilate space : those who bring messages from the dead with the regularity of the telegraph department : those who practise palmistry and divination. Those who lifted tables have retired in sulks. Therefore, the things which I have to describe need not be considered as in any way more remarkable than other things which daily happen under our very noses, and are witnessed by most credible spectators ; and as you will presently discover, they were neither remarkably new nor remarkably original. No reader of history expects things new and original.

‘ But what are you doing, Kit ? ’ asked Denny.

‘ I have been called to the Bar. I wish they hadn't called me, because the fees finished off all that was left. I am starving, Denny. ’

He looked up and laughed, with the glass in his hand. Bacchus himself, dressed in modern garments, might thus have looked and thus have laughed.

‘ But you are fat, Kit ; fat, smiling, and apparently happy. ’

‘ Who would not smile over a bottle of champagne ? But I am starving, all the same. That is to say, I actually have

to work. Denny, my friend,' he proceeded solemnly, 'work is called the common lot; it is a fatiguing lot. I work'—he sighed—'for such of the journals and organs and things as will have me. I don't get on very fast because'—he yawned—'I work so little. If I smile it is with an aching heart, because I abhor work.'

'He abhors work!' Denny repeated it with wonder. 'Why it seems to me as if there was nothing else in the whole world worth having.'

'I have had, I own, ambitions. I would rise; I would soar,'—he flapped his elbows and raised his feet off the cushions,—'but this fat, foolish body of mine forbids. It *will* be fed with meat and drink, fumigated with tobacco, lapped in slumber in bed, and laid at rest in club chairs. It is a beast of a body. I could become a great novelist or a great dramatist but for this body. As it is, I have to remain the greater part of the day in idleness, and therefore in poverty. Sometimes—but never mind. And you?'

'I am still, as you said, Dives. I am a millionaire.' He said this with a face of the deepest gloom. 'Nothing more. I continue in great riches.'

'Fie upon it for a troublesome complaint! yet, methinks there are remedies.'

'Not when one is so enormously rich as I am. Well, Kit, your poverty does you no harm, your laugh is as strong and genuine as ever. I suppose you still make up stories and tell them, and still write songs and sing them?'

'I do. If I want them sung I must sing them myself, so I go to the club, and sing them there. And I make plays, and have to act them myself, if I want them acted. Tell me about yourself. You have been travelling. What else? You look less cheerful, now I come to look at you, than a man should in your delightful position. Life—I quote from one of my unacted and unfinished comedies—is like this glass, full of bubbles. They rise and sparkle and disappear; yet they are delightful when we catch them. Why don't you sit and catch those bubbles? Go on, sweet Dives.'

'I have nothing to tell at all. I've been travelling. The world is now full of hotels, and they are all exactly alike.'

'If it's a good pattern of hotel, why not? Come now. Why not?'

'I have done nothing, and I never shall do anything,

except receive my dividends, and spend some of them. That is all.'

'The Emperor Domitian ended a similar career by catching flies. You used to talk formerly, I remember, about certain responsibilities——'

'Oh yes—yes! we used to talk.' The young man dropped his hands into his pockets as if they lived there. 'When we were young we used to talk a good deal of nonsense. It did no harm, and helped to pass the time. I've gone through those illusions.'

'That seems unlucky. Now, for my part, I cherish every one of the illusions. Hang it, sir, if it were not for the dear old illusions—Love, Friendship, Unselfishness—do you suppose that anyone would take the trouble to read my novels when they come to be written, or to see my plays when they come to be acted?'

'If I employed any people, I might own to responsibilities. But I don't. They have converted the Works into a Company, and bought me out. If I had an estate and tenants I might feel responsibility; but I have none. I do not possess an acre of land or a house anywhere. Nobody pays me rent; nobody receives wages from me; nobody curses me, and nobody blesses me. My money is all in funds and securities of that kind. I have no responsibilities at all—except to humanity in the abstract.'

'A hard case. Well, you can fall in love. That will pick one individual out of the lump of humanity. There are lots of really nice girls who wouldn't mind marrying a rich man, however rich he might be, if he would put his case prettily.'

'Love? Well . . . sometimes I think so. But I distrust women. They would only marry me for my money.'

'Dear me—this is sad. You really must get something to do, Denny. Why not go in for politics? No? There is Literature. There is Art.'

'Without the stimulus of necessity one cannot—one is afraid of being third-rate, after all.'

'You've got 'em pretty bad, old man,' said Kit. 'About as bad as they are made.'

'You lucky beggars who've got to work——'

'Lucky beggars—lucky—who've got to work!' Kit repeated, *staccato*.

'You can go on with the old illusions. You can believe in philanthropy, lofty human nature, disinterested self-sacrifice, pure patriotism and all the rest of it.'

'These are very alarming symptoms,' said Kit.

'Nobody knows'—young Dives plunged his hands deeper into his pockets—'nobody can understand what a disgusting thing it is to have so much money. It takes the colour and the taste out of everything. It makes everything yellow. It turns everything into cold boiled veal.'

'Cold boiled veal,' Kit replied thoughtfully. 'It is a food seldom exhibited at the club.'

'If one was an eldest son, a man of family, with a title and an ancient name and a good old house, it would be endurable. As for me, I came into an immense pile of money and a going concern when I was ten. I've got no family: I can't even show a coat of arms: the ancestral smockfrock or the leathern apron is within the memory of the aged.'

'Dreadful!'

'It began at school. All the other fellows looked forward to work: they had a career before them and distinction to win. The rich boy—people don't understand how lonely it makes him—knows that he needn't work at all. He hasn't got to learn anything. You might as well expect a girl engaged to be married to learn a trade. The older you grow the worse it is for you. If you've got any abilities—Lord knows whether I have any—it seems like taking the bread out of some other fellow's mouth to cultivate them. You happy fellows who've got no money can show the world how clever you are. All I had to learn was a taste for claret, so to speak.'

'Very good thing,' said Kit, 'if you can get good claret. The taste without the claret is what they have given to Tantalus and to me.'

'Other fellows,' Dives went on, 'when they want anything, have got to work for it. That makes them understand how good it is. As for me, the moment I begin to want a thing, I am able to buy it. You know you can't value anything if all you've got to do is to order it.'

'True . . . Most true.'

'And when you come of age and go out into the world, you find out—every rich man finds this out in a very short

time—that mankind are mostly made up of those who beg and those who steal. When he discovers this, he has to spend most of his time in protecting himself.’

‘One has heard something of this kind before. You put on armour, I have heard—the whole armour of Indifference.’

‘They find out where you are, though you hide yourself under an assumed name in an island of the Pacific Ocean. They pelt you with letters: they lay every kind of trap for you: they ransack your record to find out your weak places: they threaten, cajole, flatter, weep: they lie in wait for you when you go out of the house: they get inside the door on false pretences: they develop inconceivable craft and subtlety, and all to get your money.’

‘And you meet them——’

‘I never answer any of the letters. I never reply to any of the sturdy beggars, I never give anything to the earnest secretaries, the starving curates, the importunate widows, the distressed authors, the paralyzed old ladies——’

‘Poor old things!’ said Kit.

‘I answer none of their letters. Only the invitations—the invitations,’ he repeated, with a weary sigh. ‘I suppose that you, now, are still able to accept an invitation with the hope of pleasure?’

‘If there is good claret in the house and the girls are nice, why not?’

‘Why not, for you? Under the smiles of the hostess you do not detect designs: you do not see an intention to catch a prize for her daughter—you do not fear that the host is going to spring a trap upon you in order to get some of your money.’

‘None of these terrors assail me,’ said Kit.

‘In short, you have not learned to mistrust the whole world?’

‘I have not. But I now perceive where the yellow comes in.’

‘Happy man! Your poverty is your best treasure. Oh!’ his languor dropped from him and he spoke in earnest. ‘There ought to be no rich men: it is bad for the State that men should become rich: it is ruin—ruin—for a man to be born rich. Wealth makes paupers, beggars, and thieves—all our charity only generates more paupers and more

thieves. We alleviate suffering in order to disguise the cause of suffering: yet men can only learn how to act by suffering: you cannot raise, or lift, or shove along humanity by persuasion, by coaxing, by bribing: the only thing that will save the world is pain. Prick the sluggish lump, and it bellows: starve it and it moves. When humanity has been at last lashed into understanding, men will learn—not before.'

'Oh! I say,' said Kit.

Denny stopped with a queer kind of laugh.

'I ought to be the last to preach this doctrine, of course. That is because I am rich—if I had nothing I could preach what I believe. Never mind—come back to the mistrust. Man, I mistrust, I say, the whole world—whom do I not mistrust? My oldest friend—the girl whom I might have loved—every poor wretch who is starving, but who may be an impostor—every good cause—even philanthropy itself—every church, and everybody in it, from Archbishop to pew-opener.'

'I now understand,' said Kit, 'the cold boiled veal. And it is a great pity that you cannot borrow my eyes for a little.'

'What would be the good of borrowing your eyes?'

'If you had my eyes you would perceive that there are people in the world who never beg at all and only steal on recognised principles—as when the Q.C. takes fifty guineas and doesn't even read the case. You would also make the acquaintance of people who would help you to keep up the old illusions—love, friendship, sincerity—everything. I am in love myself—desperately in love, with the dearest, sweetest, loveliest little fairy in the world, and I ought to know. Illusions, sir? Hang it—they are the only realities. You poor rich creature, if I could only lend you my eyes for a little spell and make you see—what a difference there would be in you!'

'Yes, Kit—yes—if——'

'Come down and live with me for a bit. Come in disguise. Pretend to be a Pauper. My friends won't care, provided you are a clever and a clubable Pauper. To be at once a Pauper and a Fool,' he added thoughtfully, 'must be the Devil.'

'It would be no use. I should be found out next day.'

Then the distressed gentlewoman would be upon me again.'

'The long purse can buy pretty well everything,' said Kit. 'Why not look about for a mercenary Jinn or a hard-up fairy and pay him to do your bidding, and change you into something else for a while—say, a strolling banjo-man? There must be spells and incantations in existence, if one knew how to get hold of them. You might get a Lamp or—or—I say, what the deuce is the matter?' He jumped out of his chair as he asked the question, gazing in wonder on his companion.

For Mr. Denis Stirling was giving evidence by face and eyes and by gesture of surprise in extremity. He leaned back no longer, but stood upright, showing, very strongly the symptoms above delicately hinted at.

'What is it, man?'

'I did not know. I had forgotten—I thought it was only an old wife's story.'

'Forgotten what?' And again Kit's voice died away in a whisper. He tried to pour out for himself another glass of champagne, by way of cordial; but his fingers lacked the strength to clutch the bottle, and he felt as if the earth were rolling beneath him.

'I learned it in Damascus,' the other returned. 'I paid a large sum of money for the secret. My friend, your words, spoken in jest, recalled a possession which I hardly ever thought to employ. With your permission—if you will—that is—be so extremely obliging——'

'What am I to permit?'

'What you proposed, I say, in jest, can be effected if you please.'

'What did I propose?'

'That I should see things with your eyes. In order to do that we should have to exchange ourselves.'

'That is impossible. There are no longer any slaves of the Lamp or Ring.'

'Perhaps. But the thing remains. Consider a moment, Kit.' He spoke quite steadily and fluently; but kept his eyes fixed upon his friend, who had no choice but to meet his gaze. And still the earth sank under him and things went round and round, and it was as if the room and everything in it had vanished clean away. 'Consider,

my friend. This exchange is no new thing. It is, on the other hand, quite a common thing—we read of it everywhere. The incantations of Circe are founded on this secret. By means of this the great Afreet Sakhr conveyed the soul of King Solomon, for three days, into the body of a kitchen scullion. Thus was Lucius transformed into an Ass: thus King Robert of Sicily was made to become a beggar. Nay, even parts of men have been sold or exchanged. Thus are the cases of Peter Schlemihl, who sold his shadow: of Luke Lucraft, who sold his appetite: of Dr. Jekyll, who changed his outward appearance: Thackeray's Baron . . . not to speak of Mr. Bultitude and the boy——'

'You cannot, really.'

'I can if you will permit me. The thing, as I said, is by no means new.'

'Hang it,' said Kit. 'The question is whether it is new to me. It is no new thing for a baby to be born; but to me it made all the difference in the world. And dying is quite common, but the thing will have all the interest of entire novelty to me. Are you joking, Denny?'

'Certainly not. See . . .' He went into his bedroom and returned with a box, about the size of a glove-box, made of scented wood, carved. 'This contains a phial. Behold it!' He opened the box and showed a long flat bottle lying in a red silk cushion within. 'This is a very precious box indeed. There are not half-a-dozen boxes in the world containing anything so precious. The secrets, my friend, which belong to the soul have been discovered long ago—long before those which belong to the body. The contents of this phial acts upon the will as cocaine acts upon the nerves.'

'Why upon the will?'

'How should I know? If a man takes a few drops of this preparation he surrenders his will, for the time, completely to the person who administers it. Look at me. Do not take your eyes away.' He spoke with authority, but indeed Kit felt that his eyes were fixed; he was fascinated, as the bird by the snake. 'If you take them, for instance——'

'If I take them——' repeated Kit, feeling as if he were in a dentist's chair after the chloroform.

'If you take them, I shall carry out your proposal, I shall exchange with you. That is to say, you will enter into my body as into a lodging—you with your own mind, your own memories, your own learning, your own inclinations. I into yours. Do you consent?'

'For how long?'

'We can say a day—a week—a month—just as you like. But to do anything at all in the time, we want three months at least. We will say three months exactly to the day. Are you agreed to that?'

Kit murmured something. He was growing weaker and weaker.

'Remember, you will have absolute control of everything that is mine. You can buy, spend, lend, give, do what you please with the whole of my fortune. I trust you with it unreservedly. Only I warn you that you will find it desperately dull. I, for my part, shall have to get along as best I can with your more slender means. You will have, for three months, just as fine a time as unlimited wealth can give you.'

'It is like a dream,' Kit murmured. 'I will make Rosie the happiest girl in the world. They shall all be happy—all be happy.'

'Then—you consent?'

'With joy—with pleasure—with . . .'

Kit lifted his head and opened his eyes. He was standing with his back to the fireplace, leaning against the mantelshelf. He turned and saw, to his amazement, in the mirror, not himself at all—but Denny Stirling. On the shelf stood the ivory box, and in it lay a long flat phial, from which a few drops had been taken.

'I told you so.' It was his own voice—Kit's voice—that spoke to him, and in the chair sat Kit himself; but he had replaced the glass of champagne upon the table, and now sat up looking strangely alert and wide-awake.

'I told you so,' Kit repeated. 'Don't look so astonished, man. The trick is done.'

'What trick? Oh! I remember—I remember. Have I been fainting? I felt faint. What have you done? Where am I?'

'You will come round in a moment. Stay—drink this wine. So—that is better. The stuff is awfully strong. As

I told you, it acts on the will like cocaine on the nerves. A most valuable preparation. Well, my friend, you are all right again now, I hope. You are, for three months, Denis Stirling, and I, for three months, am Arthur Christopher Cottarel.'

'Oh!' The *nouveau riche* straightened himself out. 'Yes!—now I remember. You mesmerized me, I think, and you gave me something or other—and, upon my word, old man, you are the greatest magician of modern times. Maskelyne is nothing to you. And—I say—I am Dives—I am Dives!' He threw out his arms and laughed aloud. And then he sighed a deep and grateful sigh. 'I am Dives,' he repeated. 'I have got possession, for three months, of an enormous income. Oh! it's splendid! As for you, Denny my boy—I mean Kit—I am sorry for you, because you will have to be on the trot in a way you hardly expected. You've got fifteen and sixpence in your pocket: you are three weeks overdue with your landlady: and there is a sheaf of little bills lying on the table. A very lively time you are likely to have.'

Kit, or Denny, sprang out of his chair.

'For three months I've got to work or starve! Why, I feel as strong—as strong! Oh! it is splendid! I have got to earn the daily bread.'

Denny, or Kit, sank into the empty chair and took up Kit's abandoned glass of champagne, and fell back with Kit's laziness.

'For three months,' he murmured, 'nothing to do but to lie down and to enjoy the fruits of the earth in due season, and to make everybody else enjoy them. For three long months! What a chance! What a chance!'

CHAPTER II

THE DINNER BELL.

WHEN the first dinner bell rang, those who were playing tennis on the lawn began to play up faster, in order to make the most of the minutes left to them: those who were strolling and talking together in the garden turned reluctant steps and slowly sauntered homeward: those who were sitting in

the shade lazily moved their limbs and looked regretfully at the setting sun.

It was an evening near the end of August, when the sun goes down about seven, and the dinner bell tolls also the knell of parting day. The day had been fine; the sky was blue overhead, and rosy to west and east: the air was warmed through and through, the fragrance of jessamine and lingering honeysuckle was borne on the breeze; a few over-blown roses hung upon the bushes: the voice of the blackbird came from the woods, with the prolonged cry of the yellow-hammer: the gardens were filled with the prodigal luxuriance of late summer and early autumn—tall hollyhocks flowering at the top, big sunflowers hanging their heavy heads, sprawling nasturtiums, gladiolus broken down by the wind, ragged masses of sweet-peas lying over their sticks, and white-belled figwort—the bells filled with bumble-bees.

The tennis players were young men and maidens, whose sports, when they play together, it is at all times a joy to behold: those who walked in the gardens were young men and maidens going two and two,—garden walks were originally made in pious imitation of that sloping way constructed by the Patriarch, hand-railed on either side, which led into the Ark: those who sat on the terrace, or under the walnut-tree in the basket-chairs, were also young men and maidens. It was, in fact, a company of young men and maidens: if I were young, I should desire no better company: when one is no longer young, there is no greater pleasure than to look from a-near upon such a company, and to be among them, though not of them.

Let me never cease to look on while the Hours themselves, wreathed with flowers, dance, taking hands, and sing with lusty voices, laughing with merry lips and lovelit eyes and dimpled cheeks, flashing white arms, and tossing fair curls over shapely shoulders. They dance not for me, but for the young, who dance and sing and laugh, and run along with them, not knowing that they cannot choose but run. Earth hath no lovelier sight. Let me never turn from them to look upon those other Hours, which attend the old. Wrinkled dames are they—but their faces are sometimes kindly and full of pity,—and they dance and sing and laugh no more. But though they are old, they

are still the Hours, and they never cease to run—faster and faster still—and drag along with them the gray beards and the old ladies, the rheumatic and the gouty, the asthmatic and those who cough. Now at last they understand that they cannot choose but go with the Hours, though the pace is so cruel and the goal is so uncertain.

The house is not more than five-and-twenty miles or so out of London, but only the county guide and hand-books know it, because there is as yet no railway within eight miles of it, and therefore there are no visitors. It is let for the summer, or for a longer time if he should desire it, to Mr. Denis Stirling. There is no prettier house anywhere in the country. It was built at the time—Henry the Eighth being then young, and of a slender figure—when the old manor houses, thatched, timbered, plastered, were everywhere being pulled down, and replaced by more stately buildings in brick and stone. This house is of brick, a house built on two sides of a square—the two which face south and west. It is of two stories: the roof is high, pierced with many small dormer windows, and covered with red tiles: the square projecting windows give, it is true, less light to the rooms than those of a modern house; but such rooms as these—low, long, panelled with dark cedar, hung with portraits, brightened with gilding here and there, and with painted coats of arms, cabinets full of plate and china, polished armour and gleaming weapons—want less light than modern rooms, square and lofty. The front of the house is covered with ivy cut close and trimmed, so that it shall not hide the brick mouldings over the windows, and the shield above the door. The rooms look out on a broad terrace, which would be incomplete without its pair of peacocks: beyond the terrace is a goodly space of lawn: beyond the lawn is the garden—the old garden made five hundred years ago for the solace of the ladies—a sweet and lovely place wherein to dream the happy hours away with a companion who shall receive the thoughts and fancies of an idle summer morning. Here are the things which those fair damoysselles loved: the fountain and the dial, the walk covered with greenery of branches interlaced and protected from the blasts of north and east by a tall hedge of holly too thick for Boreas at his worst to penetrate: the trees are mulberries and apples with twisted and moss-grown

branches: the flower-beds are formal; the flowers are of the kinds beloved of old—nothing here that hath not been praised by Elizabethan poets.

The house is part of the village. This is in accordance with old English ideas: rich and poor must still live side by side in love and friendship; the Church, which here also forms part of the village, not dividing, but uniting them. Except for its tower, which is older, the Church belongs to the same period as the house: they have restored it quite lately, and its sharply cut stones want the rounding hand of Time. We will come to look upon it again after three hundred years. Let us agree to meet again this day three hundred years outside the lich-gate. In the churchyard are the graves of the villagers: in the church are the tombs and brasses of the people to whom the house and village have at various times belonged. Outside the churchyard and the house is the village green, and in the middle of the village green there is a circle of tall elms surrounding the old well. The cottages of the people are on the other sides of the green. And there is nowhere a more peaceful or more beautiful village than this—nowhere is there a fragment of Arcady more truly genuine. Surely—surely the people must be full of all the rural virtues. Here contentment, gentle speech and kindly thoughts must ever dwell. This to believe, raises our love and respect for the rural virtues, and encourages us in their daily practice, even when we go back to town, where also the virtues of Arcady may be practised.

The tenant of this house sat lazily in a basket-chair, one of the Indian kind, where you can lie back and put up your feet. He sat with his head on his hand, looking out upon the garden and upon the people in it. When you saw Denny Stirling last he was discontented; too much wealth had made him grumpy: now the sunshine of content glowed upon his face. He was talking to an elderly lady—there must always be an elderly lady in every company—we pretend that it is necessary on account of the *convenances*, but it is, really, because the contrast of age with youth is so useful to the latter. Sophia Gentry was the name of this old lady. Everybody in the profession knows Sophia, the water-colour painter. She is not, to be sure, quite the leader in that branch of English Art, but by that unwearied

brush of hers she first kept her mother: then she kept her husband and her mother: next, her husband and her mother and her three children. She still keeps herself, because so long a struggle leaves nothing behind it in the way of accumulated wealth. She sat on a low chair beside her host, her hands crossed in her lap, her face sweet and benignant, set in its frame of gray hair, a picture of lovely age.

'Denny, it is disgraceful. You ought to be up and playing lawn-tennis—or riding—or walking—or doing something,' said the old lady. 'You really are the very laziest man I have ever seen.'

'Lazier than Kit Cotterel, with whom you are always comparing me?'

'Much. Because he is obliged to do something, sometimes. Otherwise he would starve.'

'I like lying down and looking on and listening,' he murmured. 'All sorts of thoughts come into a man's head while he is looking on and listening. Pretty thoughts: pathetic thoughts, so beautiful that they cannot be written down.'

'Man does not live on beautiful thoughts alone.'

'Yet, Sophia mine,' he said, 'you who have to marry, on what do you live?'

'I live partly on memories,' she replied sadly. 'When one comes to seventy years there are memories in every breath of wind, in every hour that strikes—even in every face that one sees. The dead are with me, Denny, and I live with them.'

Denny took her hand and pressed it.

'You remind me,' she said, smiling, 'every day more and more of my poor Kit Cotterel. Not in appearance, because you are tall and—well—good-looking, sir; while Kit is short and fat, and not beautiful at all.'

'He isn't?' said Denny with a laugh and a quick gleam in his eyes.

'No; not a bit. Even Rosie admits that. But you have so many of his little tricks. He is fond of pressing my hand, just to show that he understands me and loves me: you know he is a kind-hearted lad, our Kit.'

'Humph!' said Denny. 'Is he?'

'You talk like him' you love to call people by their

Christian names, like him : you dislike ceremony, like him : you even play and sing like him.'

'I told you, Kit gave me all his songs.'

'Yes : and you have caught his manner. And—oh, dear me—you are so lazy.'

'Why are we here if not to be lazy? It is the summer season : it is holiday : it is always afternoon : we are all resting.'

'Yes—that is very well. You can be as lazy as you please. There is this difference, though. To Kit, his laziness is the ruin of his life : because he will not work, he will not succeed. When it is too late he will repent and reproach himself. And there is that girl to consider : he will spoil her life too.'

'Beast of a Kit,' said Denny. 'Pitch into him, Sophia.'

'I was in hopes that you, as his friend, would speak to him.'

'I have, Sophia, times out of mind. I have said to him, speaking into the looking-glass, a thousand times : "Kit, you are a pig."'

'Why into the looking-glass?'

'Oh! for convenience, of course. Why else? "Kit," I say, "you are a pig." But it is of no use, none. Kit must go his own way. My opinion is, that when he has had a long rest, and the opportunity of learning what his friends frankly think of him, he will reform. He must. He shall—he will—reform. I will make him.'

'You? No, Denny, you will only make him worse.'

At this point the dinner bell already spoken of began to ring.

Sophia got up obediently.

'Think of the poor girl, Denny, and do what you can. And now I must go. Alas! only a week more—less than a week. It is terrible to think that one must go back to London again, and to the mill. Alas!'

'Alas!' Denny sat up lazily and echoed the sigh.

'As for ever doing it again, you will be too lazy, Denny. Besides, such a thing is never repeated. It will become a beautiful dream. I have for once had the life of a country house in the midst of wealth and plenty and luxury. I think I have never seen in all my life before so many peaches and grapes as I have actually devoured in these

months. Denny—you foolish, lazy, insequentia person, you have made an old woman happy. You have her blessing, my son; and as for the girls—but here they come.

The thing itself is so simple that one wonders why it has never been done before, and why it is not done every year by every rich man. Yet it is so unusual—in fact, it never had been done before by anybody—that to the girls themselves it seemed as if the man who did it had been sent down straight from Heaven, in order to do something for those who work so hard and get so little. This young Dives, as kind-hearted as he was rich, actually invited to his house—and that the most lovely house ever imagined—as many girls as the house would hold for the whole of their summer holidays, if they could get any holidays. He invited them in companies and troops: he also invited them individually and severally, because no girl likes to be considered one of a company; and he invited young gentlemen to meet them—yea, pleasing young gentlemen, open to the sweet influence of Venus, that bright planet more powerful even than the Pleiades: impecunious they were mostly, like the girls, but hopeful, and some of them had both feet on the ladder. He said, this benevolent Dives:

‘Come, you poor things. You are young: your feet are aching to dance—you shall dance the soles off your shoes if you like: your eyes are dim with tears, because your lips cannot laugh—here you shall laugh as much as you please: you yearn in your sultry lodgings for the fragrance of the flowers, the babbling of the streams, the rustling of the leaves—here you shall have garden, and stream, and woods: you long for the society of other young people, especially of that sex which makes sport and causes laughter, creates mirth, and invents everything for delight and for use—here you shall find them: you desire the play of youth and its talk, the words which mean nothing and yet so much—here you shall have that play. Come to me; I will give you feast, and dance, and song—perchance, if kind Heaven will, you shall hear the voice of Love. Other rich men, moved by the terrible fate of him who suffered Lazarus to lie at his gates, draw cheques for hospitals and the relief of the starving. As for me, I think of the poor gentlewomen for whom nothing is done, though they also lie at the gates of

the rich man's house, and eat the crumbs which fall from his table. Come, then, all who can.'

Was there ever a more excellent Dives? What gratitude, what love, could be found adequate in return for hospitality so gracious and so unbounded? Nay—it was whispered that railway journeys were paid; that mysterious gifts of frocks, hats, jackets, gloves—and I know not what—arrived for those girls who were invited. One should not inquire too closely into these things. Certain it is that there was no girl among all that company who had reason to be ashamed of her dress, and how that circumstance could have happened without mysterious or miraculous intervention one cannot understand.

They came running in, I say, laughing and chattering—only twenty minutes left for dressing. Said I not that all were young? The men were under thirty—well, thirty-five at the outside. After thirty-five, as well as I remember, one can no longer pretend to the *première jeunesse*: the women were all under five-and-twenty, with an average nearer to twenty-one than to twenty-five. In previous parties at this Summer House of Holiday there had been ladies of more advanced age, but, for certain reasons of his own, Denny reserved a party all young for the last four weeks. At the first aspect of the girls one became conscious of certain small differences: they were not in all respects like the girls one generally meets at garden-parties, and dinners, and evening jumperies. Perhaps they were not dressed so well: it is difficult for the male historian to speak with authority on this point: certainly most of them showed a creditable leaning towards the beautiful in raiment. On the other hand, free thought, abhorrent to the average feminine soul, marked their taste. Apart from dress, their faces were somewhat graver than those of maidens who belong to society, and their eyes were steadier. For, you see, these girls were, all of them, every one of them, of those who work for their livelihood. This fact will account for many little points of difference. The men with them were also working bees: not one among them all of those who spend their lives in shooting and fishing and hunting, and so earn the poet's reproach of barbarian. Now, if you come to think of it, a country house filled with such guests as these—young people all, and young people driven by neces-

sity, possibly kind necessity—to work for their daily bread—is rather remarkable, even at a time when so many remarkable experiments are tried.

One of the first of the girls to run up the steps was Rosie Romaine. Everybody called her Rosie, and I believe she liked it. But indeed, in this house, the use of the Christian name was the only rule. It was quite as if they belonged to the Early Church. Rosie was one of the race of Little Women, whose history and origin will be found in my forthcoming great work—if ever I find time to write it—on the Races of Women in Great Britain. There are not now so many little women as there were thirty or forty years ago. Then they abounded: you will find them in the novels—everywhere; they went out of fashion, and were succeeded by the dumpy, stumpy girl, whom you will find in the works of Leech: these, in their turn, went out, and were followed by the tall girls who now reign, with Mr. Du Maurier for their Prophet.

None the less, there are never wanting some who still worship the Little Woman: and though most girls show that touching obedience to man's wishes which goes straight to our hearts, and grow tall to please us, and remain dumpy when dumpiness is fashionable, there are still some little women who survive and possess the dear little dainty ways once so dear to all men, and especially men of six feet and upwards. They are mantraps of a dangerous kind, though their taller sisters affect to consider them insignificant. Insignificant, indeed! There is no such thing as an insignificant woman.

But the Little Venus is little all over: her face and hands and feet and arms must be on the smallest scale: in their smallness they must show the beauty of proportion more sweetly than their larger-limbed sisters. And the Little Venus is like her big sister in having many varieties and kinds. Chiefly I love two kinds: the dignified little woman—nowhere in the world can one find greater dignity than in the little woman—and the little woman who has no dignity at all. She has everything else, but no dignity. She is lively, merry, laughing, charming, piquante, and affectionate. She is never silly, and she is never affected; she is womanly and human through and through: she may have a temper—she often has so much temper that she is never out of it

—but she is never envious nor spiteful: she is large-hearted: she neither thinketh nor speaketh ill of her sisters. When she is happy she is entirely happy: she loves warmth, softness, and ease: she would like all the world to be rich, and to possess the things which make life beautiful.

Such a little woman was Rosie. She added one quality, all her own: she was caressing. Every man who talked with her perceived affection for himself—sisterly affection, perhaps—and interest in him. She was caressing in her eyes and in her voice: on his very first introduction, every man understood that this poor girl had been waiting and looking for the chance of talking with him, and that she was at last perfectly happy. This kind of thing makes a man satisfied with himself and friendly disposed towards the girl. No one, therefore, was ever found to speak evil of Rosie, nor to call or to think her a coquette, even after he had proposed to her—everybody always did that on the second day—and had been refused—as always happened—and had been taken to the nearest hospital to get his shattered heart pieced together again.

See the contrariness of Fortune. She, who should have been born heiress to a nice little Palace, with a beautiful carriage, and fur wraps, and six-foot footmen, and unlimited credit with Madame Hortense, was forced to reside in one of the little houses near the Addison Road Station, convenient for the train—third class. Fate had robbed her of her father, the famous Unsuccessful Water-Colour Painter. It was also decreed that she was to have no money and a copious—a cornu-copious—supply of brothers and sisters, and a ridiculously inadequate allowance of gloves, frocks, and bonnets. To add that she inherited her father's artistic genius and his want of success, is only to give an additional detail to these incongruous arrangements of Fate.

Among those who proposed to her was Kit Cotterel. She was taken unawares—it was an unfair advantage: the thing was done one summer evening, when she was perfectly happy—except for her boots: she had on nice gloves, a new frock, and a hat newly trimmed; she was up the river—oh, rare chance! The air was warm and fragrant: the lover was as eloquent as if he had been the most industrious and successful creature in the world: the maiden melted: she had been no more caressing to Kit than to anybody else:

and she went home the *fiancée* of a man as impecunious as herself, and as uncertain of the future.

Rosie ran up the steps. When she reached the terrace she turned round once more to look upon the gardens.

'Oh!' she sighed, 'how lovely it is! And oh! one more day is nearly done, and only a week is left!'

Denny Stirling, to whom she addressed the sigh, responded with another so hollow as to be almost a groan. Sympathy is as infectious as yawning: when one young person begins to confide in another, the other—if of the opposite sex—sighs in response. I knew a man once who drew all hearts by the way in which he would mingle his tears with the tears of any girl who was at once confiding and beautiful and sad: yea—he would sometimes mingle tears until lips met lips, so that he achieved a great reputation, and became popular. He would also have become rich, but he gave away all his money to the girls who cried.

'Yes,' said Denny, 'three months are soon gone. I thought they would last for ever.'

'Alas! they are nearly gone.'

'Will you come out after dinner, Rosie? It is going to be a lovely evening.'

'I am afraid I cannot, any more.'

'Why not? There will be stars in the infinite azure, with deep blacknesses between them. I will show you the blacknesses, and the stars you can see for yourself. The jessamine is always most fragrant after dark. There are cock-chafers buzzing across the lighted windows, and buck-beetles. Gnats are lively under the trees, and we will look for a glowworm. You told me the other night that you had never seen a glowworm. With you for a scientific companion, I could search for that glowworm half the night.'

'There are also in the garden, sometimes, men who forget what is due to their friends,' she replied with severity.

'Never. There cannot be such men. If anyone has seemed—I say, Rosie, seemed—to forget this important duty, it was for the first and only time. Forget their friends? Why, they would have no one to borrow from.'

'Well, Denny, I did think——'

There is no reason why a sentence need be completed when three words give the key to the rest.

'You will come, Rosie?' he answered, and if anyone had been listening he would have thought that there was something—even a great deal—of tenderness in his pronunciation of the Christian name. Nature has infinite varieties of everything, but in nothing is she more various than in the pronouncing of the Christian name.

Rosie looked at him reproachfully. That is, she honestly intended reproach. But she broke down, and her eyes became sisterly and sorrowful, if not affectionate.

'I will come, Denny. But—remember.' She held up a finger of admonition, and passed in. What was he to remember? The young man remained outside, looking after her with an odd expression of bewilderment and anxiety.

The next who came up from the tennis-ground was a girl in pink, with a pale blue blouse, held in place by a leather belt and a bright buckle. It is a dainty costume, and the pride of this year of grace. This girl was Vernon Cheviot—everybody knows that this is only her literary name, and that her real name—Molly Damper—is not nearly so distinguished.

There is a prejudice against the literary young lady. She is believed to be plain and to be careless about dress; she runs, it is thought, to nose and to spectacles. These be calumnies invented by those who have got pretty faces and shallow wits. Vernon Cheviot's is a case which should destroy this prejudice. The young lady who becomes a poet or a novelist or an artist of any kind is not necessarily plain.

'I am to take you in this evening,' said her companion, one of the youngest Masters of a great Public School. 'You shall scold me all through dinner, if you please. I would rather be scolded by you than——'

Here they both disappeared within the door, and one of the peacocks squalled for luck, and so the rest of the speech could not be heard; and, as this young lady has very little to do with the story, it matters not.

Then the rest came trooping in. There was the teacher from the High School. She had acquired so vast a knowledge of philology that the Cambridge Examiners gave her a place in the first class of the Classical Tripos, and the High School Board gave her another place in their School worth exactly one hundred pounds a year—so magnificent is the

endowment of feminine Scholarship. But this immense income she kept to herself, a secret locked up in her bosom—because no High School teacher ever owns to her salary. It is a Rule of the Profession.

There was another—but, no. Why enumerate them? They were gentlewomen all, and had for the most part been brought up in the expectation of being provided for by somebody. Among those who came here for a holiday and a rest during Denny's three months' experiment were those who try Fortune with the art of Fiction, and those who woo her favour with the art of Painting: there were short-hand writers, type-writers, governesses, clerks, players of dance music, writers of addresses, interviewers, guides, secretaries, indexers, translators,—everything. They came to rest and to breathe, expecting nothing more than the boon of fresh air, with simple food and shelter. They found a stately house, with a return of all those things which once they had known, and had long since lost by reason of Madame Poverty, who drives away from her victims everything that is pretty, happy, and comfortable.

The last to come in was Geraldine. You know the kind of girl who is a kind of queen in her circle. She imposes her sovereignty by no assumption of claim or heirship or right Divine. It is conferred upon her without explanation and accepted by all without question. Men do not try to flirt with her; when she smiles on a man she confers distinction: she is by nature a *grande dame de par le monde*: she is too high for most: small men and mean men shrink from her. Geraldine was tall—somehow the natural queen is always stately. For her calm face and her tranquil eyes, which seemed to reveal a soul in which there was no touch of earthly passion or taint of earthly meanness, she might have stood for Beatrice. As for earthly meanness, of that she had none: as for earthly passion, is not earthly love held to be a type of heavenly love, or even the gate by which many are led to that joy ineffable? Yet some such women never know that passion, because they never find the man who is able to awaken within them the sacred fire. She, too, was one of those who work. She was a decorative artist, and chiefly spent her time in designing furniture.

She was not a tennis-player, and therefore the costume affected by the other girls tempted her not. She was dressed

in white with a flower at her throat. Beside her walked a lad of twenty or so: he was a slight and slender lad, no taller than herself: he was narrow in the shoulders and hollow in the chest: a beautiful boy—fair of hair but not ruddy—he looked up at his companion, as he walked, with large and full eyes—they were eyes of worship, even such as those with which Dante followed Beatrice.

‘Rest this evening, Robbie,’ said Geraldine. ‘Do not talk much at dinner, and go to bed early. To-morrow we will read your verses again, and we will talk them over and think how we can find a publisher.’

‘It seems as if I must go on working, Geraldine. I am so full of thoughts and I have so little time. Let me sit up a little while to write by myself at night.’

‘No, Robbie. You must go to bed early. And you must not think of the worst. Why, you are better already, and you have only been here a fortnight. See what fresh air and a holiday can do for you.’

‘Yes, I am better here. But next week I must go back to the old drudgery. What is the good of getting into Heaven, if one has to go out again after three weeks? No—no—forgive me, Geraldine—I shall have had you and this place for three long precious weeks. Oh! I shall have enough to remember all through the winter. Forgive me—I am not ungrateful—no—no. In the drudgery and the misery of it——’

‘Yes, Robbie; but patience—have patience. Things may happen.’

‘What can happen to one who has no friends and no money? But I shall remember. Oh! Geraldine’—he took her hand and stooped and kissed it—‘I shall remember.’

He walked slowly up the steps and into the house with hanging head.

‘Is he better?’ asked Denny, looking after him anxiously.

‘His cough is better. But there is the winter before him and——’

‘Yes—I know. Can nothing be done?’

Geraldine made no reply; but followed the boy.

Strange and wonderful are the ways of rich men. Here was Denny, the young owner of millions: he knew, he could not choose but know, that all the boy wanted was rest, sunshine, relief from work, a warm climate: given these, he

would recover and might grow strong; without these he would die—he would most surely die. And yet he seemed to love the boy. Nobody, except Kit Cotterel, had ever been so kind to Robbie or shown so much interest in him. Yet, he asked—he, the rich man, asked—if nothing could be done! And he sighed as he looked after him, and something like a tear rose in his eyes! And he could stop it if he chose! Strange it is to be Dives.

Left alone, Denny Stirling looked about him as Rosie had done, and then he sighed.

‘I’ve written to her,’ he said, ‘every other day. And she still replies exactly the same! She must love me as much as ever. And yet she carries on. Oh, it is her nature! What has she said to me here that I could object to—over there? I can’t keep away from her. I am longing all the time to throw my arms round her and tell her all. But, I mustn’t. She would never believe me—never! That’s the worst of being before your time—or behind it. I dare say in a year or two an exchange of this kind will be all the fashion. It will be an admirable leveller and peacemaker. This kind of thing they used to do in the days of King Solomon. And now they’ll begin it again; but we are before our times—and Rosie would never believe it. I must be very careful—very. A single moment off my guard, and——’

He shuddered and went in to dress.

CHAPTER III.

THE CONFESSIONS OF A FIANCÉE.

At ten o’clock the air in the garden was still warm and balmy. Those who sat or walked under the stars breathed the fragrance of many flowers, though the season was so far advanced. The heavy scent of jessamine hung in the air as persistently as a London fog. This perfume, as is not generally known, formed a principal ingredient in those acts of witchcraft which were designed to suggest thought, induce temptation, and destroy the will. Especially it was found sovereign for softening the heart and opening it for the reception and the bestowal of confidence. Every young person has felt this soft influence of jessamine. A very fine

flowering specimen formerly grew in the garden of Eden, close to the apple-tree. Those who were in the garden on the terrace not only breathed the incense of this seductive plant, but their souls were lulled to rest by the music which floated out of the doors and windows of the drawing-room. This goodly company sometimes danced, sometimes sang, sometimes made and acted plays, sometimes talked; but whatever they did, there was always music—sometimes such as falls peacefully, and sometimes such as stirs and stimulates, and sometimes such as sets the feet spinning—but always music.

Two of the company were walking up and down the terrace: one—you may recognise her by her slight and slender figure, clothed in white, a lace shawl over head and shoulders—was Rosie Romaine; the other—a tall form walking beside her with hanging head, as if despondent—was Denny Stirling. Rosie kept her promise: she came out after dinner, but not alone; others were in the garden, but they were in pairs, for mutual solace and protection against wild beasts or ghosts.

‘Back again,’ the girl was saying—‘back again to the old life.’

‘Poor child! and—what was that you said yesterday? the unsatisfied longing!’

‘Anybody who is too poor to have what she wants suffers, I suppose, from unsatisfied longings! Oh! how I yearn—how I long—how I pray for the things I shall never get!’

‘Tell me what they are—some of them.’

‘They are everything. I should like to surround myself with pretty things—a pretty house with pretty furniture, pretty dresses, and pretty people. Poor people may be good and interesting and heroic, and anything you please, but they never have pretty things about them—never.’

‘Poor child! Fate is cruel. Where there can be no beauty, there should be no desire for it! But then the world would never get on at all, would it?’

‘If we only had a world which had done getting on, and was quite got on, you know—*arrivé*—so that we were all rich and artistic, and really nice together! and if the easy life was served out to everybody instead of one or two here and there,’

'You would do no work, of course.'

'Of course I would not. Every woman loathes task-work—though, because so many have got to do it, some of us pretend to like it. I should like to wake up every morning with a sense of holiday, nothing before me but to feel the joy of living.'

'And in this life, this beautiful life, will there be'—he hesitated—'would there be any place for love?'

'It is so like a man to ask such a question,' she replied, smiling superior. 'Oh! Denny, have you got to learn, at your age, that a woman can never be happy without love. You might as well ask me if there would be no air, no light, no sunshine in life. Why, every dream of every girl is brimful of love. Of course, there will be love. I can speak openly, because, you see, I am engaged.'

'I forgot. Yes, you are engaged.'

'Yes,' she replied shortly—meaning: 'I am indeed; and to your friend.'

'Yes,' he repeated, as one who would have added: 'I know it, and am going to remember it.'

'Yes,' she said, for the third time, now meaning: 'And mind you do remember it.'

This kind of conversation may be continued as long as each side sees the other's meaning. As soon as the thread of thought is lost, it ceases to interest. Denny broke it off at this point.

'You will marry, and then you will have all that you desire. Kit will give you everything. He must—he can desire nothing better than to pour the whole wealth of the world into your lap.'

Rosie laughed.

'Poor dear Kit! This is exactly how he himself talks. All the wealth of the world is to be mine. He will pour sackfuls of diamonds, and rubies by the score into my lap. I shall have only to hold up my apron. And all the time he is weeks in arrear with his landlady. Kit give me everything? Why, the poor dear man has got nothing to give: and he never will have anything.'

'Never? But Kit will work. You shall see.'

'He will promise to work. Then he will sit down and dream that he has worked hard and is enjoying the wealth of all the Indies as the fruits of his labour. No; Kit has

no money, and he never will have any. He has no rich relations, even, to leave him any. Rich uncles are extinct, as a race. Uncles there are still, I believe; but they are all poor, with distressingly large families of their own.'

'Yes,' said Denny, as despondently as if he himself were as poor as Kit. 'This age has witnessed the final degradation of the uncle. He can sink no lower. He is now married—forgetful of his nephews, selfish beast—and he has children of his own. I forgot, though. Had I not myself an uncle, who gave his little all to me, and nothing to my cousins? But why can't Kit—this poor dear Kit—make money like everybody else?'

'He is so horribly lazy, you see. He *cannot* work. He can do nothing but lie and smoke his pipe and dream away the time. He is Lob-lie-by-the-fire. Sometimes he writes verses. Mostly he sits about with his pipe. In the summer it is in the open—and in the winter it is in the most comfortable chair that the club has to offer by the fire. And he dreams.'

'You can't sell dreams,' said Denny. 'There ought to be a market though, somewhere, for really good, first-class, artistic dreams.'

'He is going to write the most wonderful novels and plays that were ever seen. They will take the world by storm. But they don't get written. Oh! I am very fond of Kit—everybody is.' Why did the young man groan at this point? 'But I am under no illusion as to the life before me.'

'For example—the kind of life?'

'Just what it has always been. I was born in a muddle, and I shall go on in a muddle. You did not know my poor dear father, of course. There never was a more delightful parent, and the way he believed in his own work quite to the end was wonderful. But nobody ever bought his pictures, and really I now begin to believe that they may have been, after all, deficient in—well—strength. Do you understand?'

'He was, in fact, unsuccessful.'

'Yes. Well, you see, Kit, in literature, is exactly like that parent of mine in art. He is always going to do great things. Some day we shall marry, I suppose,' she sighed. 'I don't believe Kit will be half so nice as a husband. We shall find a horrid cheap flat with three or four rooms and a

kitchen. We shall have a single servant, who will trample on us. We shall always be behindhand with the rent and the washing: there will never be any money for nice things, or for going anywhere or doing anything. As for society, what can one expect? Debt and duns and tightness is my portion in the world. I am a third-classer, too proud to talk to the other third-classers.'

'No—no—Kit will change. He must, he shall.'

Rosie shook her head.

'I know my Kit,' she said, 'better than you. And I have no illusions. And poverty will be nothing new: we have been poor and in difficulties. One is used to it. We cannot escape Fate. When such people as Kit and I marry, the situation is quite easy to foretell.'

'There is your own art.'

'Oh! I have not forgotten it. My own art earns for me about as much as the wages of one of your housemaids. It will add a trifle to the family income, and a great deal to the family worry.'

'Have you seen Kit lately?'

'No. Three months ago he sent me word that he had got some work to do which would take him out of London. I suppose he has been lying on the sea-shore dreaming and smoking all the time.'

'Has he not written to you?'

'Oh, yes; he has written: he writes to me three times a week. And he says nothing about his work.'

'There, you see! What did I tell you? Three months on end of work,—three steady months of hard work—grinding work. There's a splendid beginning for you! There's perseverance!'

'Yes,' she replied doubtfully. 'Tell me, Denny—you who know Kit so well—what do you think of his style?'

'You mean the style of his songs and verses?'

'Yes, and of the more ambitious things, the things that he sends to Editors,—the things they generally send back. Have you seen any of them?'

'I have seen all of them.'

'Then what do you think?'

She did not stop to ask him how it happened that he had seen all these things.

'Nay—first—what do you think?'

'He has been as much rejected as most men. And I really think he ought to expect nothing else.'

Denny started.

'Have you told him this?'

'No—I have not. When you are engaged to a man, and he brings you a thing and reads it aloud, and thinks he has put into it all he has in his heart, and asks you, with a trembling voice and eager eyes, what you think of it—what can you say?'

Denny grunted something inarticulate.

'Can you tell the poor boy that it won't do at all—that it wants re-writing?'

Denny shook his head.

'No, one can't do it. A girl can do nothing but purr and murmur and tell him how sweet it is,—how true and touching,—the best thing he has ever written—the best thing she has ever heard. Then he goes away happy. It is no good for a man to be engaged unless his girl can send him away happy.'

'None—none,' Denny replied, hollow-voiced.

'He never has the patience to re-write his things—to sit down and worry and to work at them. He gives ten minutes to his work, brings you a pretty little sketch and calls it a finished picture.'

'Yes—I fear—I suppose—that may be so.'

Denny took his chin in his left hand and stroked it. This is a gesture which indicates embarrassment or difficulty. It may also mean other things.

'Don't think, please,' Rosie went on, 'that I am taking away poor Kit's character, or talking unkindly about him. All my friends say the same thing.'

'Do they indeed? It is truly kind of them. Friends—candid friends—are so useful and so kind.'

'Why, Denny, must you be so sarcastic? Kit himself might have been speaking.'

'No, no, Kit would have spoken less like a finished picture: more like a sketch.'

'Nobody talks better than Kit, for that matter.'

'I am glad to hear that he has some good qualities.'

'One would think you were offended. Of course he has good qualities. He is the most generous of men, to begin

with. He gives away most of his money, and lends the rest.'

'And lives on——'

'No; on what remains, he gets into debt. Poor Kit, you see, in money matters is a terrible donkey. But then, everybody loves him.'

'How can you—how can everybody—love a man who is a donkey, and who is always in debt, and whose style is sketchy?'

'Absurd! you love the man—not his debts or his style or his donkeydoms. They are not a part of the man.'

'Well, Kit ought to be happy,' said Denny, 'if only because one woman——'

'Thank you,' she interrupted him quickly, 'if one woman didn't another would. Men can always comfort themselves with that reflection. Kit, now, is perfectly happy, though he hasn't seen me for three months. He dreams that he has just brought out a novel over which the world has gone frantic. Or else, that he has just produced a play which has driven the town mad. This kind of dream comes to him every day.'

'It seems a harmless occupation.'

'Perfectly harmless. Kit will never make his wife jealous. She might, to be sure, wish to see him more practically occupied. She will have the butcher's bill, the laundress's bill, and the third application for the rent, spread upon the table, with twopence in her pocket. Pity that it is not enough for a husband to be harmless.'

I suppose there is hardly anything more offensive to a man than to be called harmless. To be called ill-tempered, surly, grasping, prodigal, unjust, may be borne with philosophy; but to be called harmless—actually not able to injure anybody—a creature without a kick in him, is a deadly thing. It was too dark for the girl to see the hot blush—of sympathy for his friend—mantle to her companion's brow.

'One of Kit's idle dreams,' Rosie continued, 'was to do exactly what you have done this summer.'

'Was it? Then he did dream something practical.'

'What is the use of dreaming things that you can never carry out? He used to say, however, when he was rich—"when" you see—that he meant to take a country house

and fill it all the summer with girls and people—like these who are here, you know—without money, but just as fond of society and everything as if they were rich.'

'Yes—I suppose I borrowed that from Kit,' said Denny. 'I borrowed all his ideas as well as his songs. I wish I hadn't.'

'You wish you had not! Oh, Denny—and you have given so much happiness to everybody! You cannot wish that happiness had never been. Don't say that, Denny,' she added, in her most caressing voice. 'And we are all so grateful to you for what you have done. Oh, so grateful—and we all owe you so much! Oh, so much!'

'Rosie!' he cried, with passion irrepressible, 'I don't care for all the rest—if you alone—'

But she fled.

'I am a Fool,' said Denny, with emphasis. Then he walked quick to the end of the terrace, where there was a stone bench, upon which he sat down, also emphatically. 'A FOOL!' he repeated. Then he took his chin in his hand again and began to think. He had a good deal to think about. He had just heard some very remarkable and unpalatable truths. To begin with, the girl to whom Kit Cotterel was engaged had no illusions about her lover. How can you be in love without illusions? They are, the anatomist knows, at the very root and foundation of love. But, as this young man knew not, here is one of the divine and unfathomed mysteries of the feminine heart. The thing which is absolutely impossible in man is done every day by the merest girl, when she loves a man and yet has no illusions about him. The girl who was engaged to Kit confessed that she had habitually deceived him as regards the beauty and value of his work, which she always understood to be sketchy. Kit, she knew, would never get on—he was too lazy—he was too dreamy; he would always be poor and always in a muddle; the life before her was one of continual struggle; she would be dragged down and kept down by poverty; and all because her husband was so lazy—so dreamy—so unsuccessful.

He sprang to his feet. No—no—it should not be. After a long holiday of three months even this Neapolitan laziness would be satisfied: even the idle Kit would be able to turn over a new leaf—a new leaf. Denny sat down again

with a sweet smile, attracted by the imaginary possibilities thus presented to his mind, and for full a quarter of an hour dreamed of splendour and prosperity, of fame and fortune, to be found written on that new and lovely leaf.

CHAPTER IV.

THE NEW LEAF.

WHEN Denny awoke out of this soothing dream he returned to the drawing-room, quite cheerful again, and ready to dance or to play, or to take part in any kind of festivity. He had, it is true, felt a little annoyance at Rosie's frank utterances. This vexation had now vanished: the beatific Vision of the New Leaf consoled him. Fond wretch! He thought he was going to have complete control over that new leaf. Every Resolver thinks that. But you shall see.

He came back to the drawing-room, therefore, quite happy.

'Sing us a song, Denny.'

'What shall I sing?' He sat down, turned a smiling face upon his friends, and ran his fingers carelessly up and down the keys. 'What shall I sing? Will you have Kit's song, "For those who play"? He gave it to me three months ago—words and music.'

He had a soft and musical voice of no great power, but of sufficient compass, and he managed it skilfully.

'Oh! the earth is full of treasure,
And the soul can find its fill:
'Tis a garden-house of pleasure—
For the joy of those who will.
And her treasures waste not—spoil not:
And they follow day by day;
Life is long—for those who toil not;
Only long—for those who play.
'Twine the roses—bind the lilies—
While we dance and while we sing;
For the hours, sweet partner Phillis,
Fly like swallows on the wing.
Yet each moment as it flieth
Doth so sparkle in the sun,
That its mem'ry never dieth
Till the very day is done.

'Let us wander in the meadows,
O my love, and whisper low :
Let us linger in the shadows
With the ghosts of long ago.
Morning, noon and eve shall find us
Hand in hand and cheek to cheek :
Oh ! the mem'ries—how they bind us !
Oh ! the past years—how they speak !
'Good old Time is no despoiler
When he giveth gifts so rare ;
But the miser and the toiler,
And the student in his chair,—
These he fills with tears and sadness
For the swiftness of his way :
Life is long and full of gladness—
Only long—for those who play.'

Among the guests was one newly arrived, named Pinder, more commonly old Pinder. He is certainly no longer young Pinder. Men of fifty permit themselves to call him old Pinder. He has trodden the pavement of Fleet Street and the Strand for nearly fifty years, and has been during the whole of this period perfectly well-known to all the editors and to all the journalists. He now possesses white locks and a flowing beard : he carries his seventy years with vigour, and he still does exactly the same work as when he began at the age of five-and-twenty.

Mr. Pinder was not accustomed to the society of ladies ; he therefore remained in the drawing-room only for the short time he considered due to politeness : he was not fond of music ; he therefore sat by himself in a corner and read the evening papers. Without them—he always read them all—he felt himself cut off from all that one holds dear.

Just as Denny finished his song, and while the echoes of the last notes were rolling about the rafters of the roof, everybody was startled by the half—the better half—of an interjection more fitted for the smoking-room of the club than for a drawing-room.

'God bless me !' cried Sophia, as Speaker of the House. It was a call to order.

The interjection came from Mr. Pinder. He choked—coughed—hid his face with the paper—and replaced the utterance by one of a milder character.

'Kit Cotterel, by the Lord !' he cried.

Geraldine drew the paper from his hand. 'Oh!' she cried, reading the passage which Mr. Pinder pointed out. 'Rosie! Rosie! come, read this.'

Rosie took the paper and read it.

'But I don't understand it,' she said. 'He has never given me the least hint of this kind of work. There must be some mistake.'

'How can there be any mistake?' Geraldine asked. 'It is perfectly circumstantial. Oh! Denny, come and read this. Come, everybody. Prepare to be astonished. It is about Kit!'

Rosie laughed, incredulous.

'It is quite impossible,' she said. 'Quita. Kit couldn't do it. Unless, perhaps, he was acting.'

Geraldine seized the paper and read the paragraph aloud:

"Those who were present at the St. James's Hall last night to hear Mr. Arthur Christopher Cotterel's Lecture on the Future Relations of Capital and Production came away firmly persuaded that, whether the speaker's doctrines are sound or not, a question which we reserve until the publication of the address, here is a man who will have to be reckoned with. It was no surprise to those present to learn that the two anonymous articles lately published on branches of this great subject in the *Contemporary*, which have attracted so much attention, are also by him. Mr. Cotterel is a Barrister, a Cambridge man, and a Journalist. We believe that the secret of his studies in sociology and economics has been so well kept by himself, that no one of his many friends has had the least reason to suspect that he has been training himself for a social reformer. The wealth of knowledge and illustration lavished upon these articles would point to extensive travel as well as to enormous reading. It was, therefore, amusing to hear one or two of his friends declaring that his travels were limited to Paris or Brussels, and that his reading must have been carried on in the dead of night; and it is remarkable that a young man who may become another John Stuart Mill, but with a more genial temperament and a warmer feeling for humanity, should have begun by courting notoriety as the writer of light *vers de société*, which he was wont to sing, himself, at his club. We note the fact on the testimony of many in the Hall who

knew him, and came to hear him out of curiosity, and were expecting a comic entertainment. The address, delivered with faultless eloquence; trained voice, and a disciplined gesture, was nothing short of a vehement attack on the existing social systems. To the subject-matter of the discourse it is probable that we shall have to return again, and seriously. Meantime, the address is to be repeated, and is a thing to be heard."

'Kit Cotterel, by the Lord!' said Mr. Pinder again.

'Oh! I knew—I knew he would do something great, some day!' cried Geraldine, with glistening eyes. 'Kit was bound to do something great. Rosie, are you proud?'

'I cannot understand it,' said Rosie, looking blankly at the paper. 'Only yesterday I had a letter from him, quite in his old style, full of fun and foolishness. And not one word—not a single word—about this oration! It is impossible. His head must have been full of the subject. It must be some other Kit.'

'Some other Kit,' said Mr. Pinder. 'Without a doubt, some other Kit,' he repeated. 'Kit Cotterel on the Relations of Capital and Production! As well have Kit Cotterel on the Hittite Tongue!'

'And besides,' Rosie added, 'Kit has been out of town for three months; so that it cannot be he. Oh, somebody has taken his name. Or it is another Cotterel confused with Kit. A reporter's mistake, or perhaps a reporter's joke.'

'It is about three months,' said Mr. Pinder, 'that he began to fall off at the club. The fellows met him from time to time, and brought back strange stories. He cut everybody dead: he pretended not to know them. Kit seemed anxious to forget all his old friends!'

'What are you talking about?' asked Rosie. 'How could he meet anyone? He has been out of town for the last three months. If he has come back it was only yesterday.'

'Well, I met him less than a month ago, and he had a bundle of proofs in his hand, and looked mighty important and busy. Other fellows have met him here and there. He may have been living out of town, but he has certainly had to come up pretty often.'

'I know nothing more of his movements,' said Rosie coldly.

'And undoubtedly,' continued Mr. Pinder, 'he has grown serious. Fancy Kit Cotterel serious! Well—I've lived for seventy years, and perhaps I've known even stranger things. When I met him he pretended to have forgotten me. Actually—pretended that!'

'Well,' said Rosie, 'I dare say he did forget you for the moment. Even Kit can't be always thinking of the club.'

'I had to tell him who I was.'

'His real friends,' interrupted Geraldine, 'knew that he would come out some day. As for his laziness, I have always felt that it was nothing but the collection and the concentration of his powers.'

Rosie laughed.

'Oh! Geraldine,' she said, 'to think of Kit concentrating his power! But I don't understand,' she repeated. 'What does he know or care about Political Economy?'

'I've read the articles,' said the man of letters, 'and I will say that they are astonishing. One would think the fellow had been all round the world, and had read all the books ever written. I'll never believe in any man again—never!'

'Denny!'—Geraldine turned to him. Nobody had taken any notice of him. He was standing beside them quite pale. He looked dismayed. 'Denny, what do you think?'

'What do I think?'

'Kit has turned over a new leaf. You said he would,' said Rosie. 'A new leaf! Oh! what does it mean?'

'I do not know—I cannot understand,' said Denny. 'It is horrible to think of! Social reformer! Lecturer! Writer in the *Contemporary*! Good Heavens! What can be done?' For he remembered that yet but a week, and then—
'A new leaf—and what a leaf! Oh! it is intolerable!'

'Well,' said Mr. Pinder, 'I don't know about that. We are a free country. If Kit likes to turn socialist, or anarchist, or radical reformer, why should it be intolerable?'

'A new leaf!' Denny repeated. 'This, at least, one could not expect.'

'I think it is delightful,' said Geraldine. 'Here are you, persisting in thinking the man fit only to make light songs and set them to pretty tunes—and I knew all along the

great things lying dormant. Oh! I knew he would come to the front some day!

'Perhaps,' said Denny, 'he may break down, almost at the outset. Perhaps he will get tired of it, and go back to his club. Let us wait a week—I know Kit. Oh! I venture to prophesy that he will never keep it up.'

'It's a dreadful disappointment,' said the old man. 'I looked upon Kit as my natural successor. He had all the symptoms of stopping exactly where he was.'

'Thank you, Mr. Pinder,' said Rosie. 'We may congratulate ourselves that he is saved from *that* fate!'

She said this with great severity, and retired from the discussion concerning her lover.

Denny sat down, his chin again in his hand, looking at Mr. Pinder, and wondering that the old man had all this time entertained so strong an opinion and said nothing about it to the person chiefly concerned. The glamour of that dream about the new leaf faded quite away. The page was turned, doubtless, but what was the new page like?

Mr. Pinder went on:

'It's really very wonderful. You all know poor Kit's style—slipshod and careless—eh?'

'Slipshod and careless,' Denny echoed. 'Always the first rough sketch instead of the finished picture.'

'Just so. Well—he has completely changed his style. Yes—how he's done it I don't know. It is clear as crystal, and polished like marble. A man can change his personal habits; he may take to drink and give it up again; but how he can change his style the Lord only knows. He has changed it, however, somehow. Can the leopard change his spots?'

'In other words,' said Geraldine, 'Kit has for once in his life—the first time—taken real pains, and shown what he can do. This is the result.'

'Yes.' The old man looked at her keenly under his white eyebrows. Then he glanced at Rosie, who seemed puzzled, but not proud. 'You always believed in him—didn't you? Well, it seems that we have lost Kit Cotterel. I am seventy years of age, and perhaps I have known things happen more wonderful even than this. I thought when I met Kit the other day,' continued the Sage, 'that a change had come over him. First, he did not see me—that was nothing.

Then he did not remember me—that was absence of mind. But when I asked him to lend me half a sovereign and he refused, I perceived that he was gone—our Kit was gone.'

'I think, Mr. Pinder,' said Geraldine, 'that Kit has already lent his friends too many half-sovereigns.'

'He thought so too, for the first time in his life, and must needs explain his refusal by adding a maxim or two: "When a man knows he can borrow," said Kit the Moralist, "he will not work." "When he knows he can borrow"—confound the puppy! "A man who knows he can borrow will not work." He heaved that maxim at my head. I can't say more.'

An hour after midnight, and the only two left awake in the house were Mr. Pinder and Denny Stirling. They were in the smoking-room, with 'materials,' and really, as the elder man remarked, considering the comfort of the chairs and the quality of the Scotch, and the late hour, one might almost fancy himself back at the club.

'Now they are all gone to bed, we can talk,' said the old man. 'No house is tolerable till the women are in bed. This Scotch is admirable. I seem to have known you, my boy, all your life, though I've only really known you for the last few days. I suppose it's partly because you are so amazingly like Kit—poor beggar! I mean before he went to the Devil and became serious, and began to fling maxims at his best friends.'

'I believe I resemble him in many particulars.'

'You do—not in your money, nor yet in your appearance; for Kit had no money, and in appearance he was common. Short and fat and, well—common. It is the only word. Quite a common object to look at.'

'Quite,' said Denny, colouring and grinning. 'A pebble by the sea-shore. A paving-stone on the kerb.'

'But like him in your ways. Poor old Kit! He's as good as gone. He means to get to the front. Well, I've never been there, but I don't think it can be quite so comfortable as in the back rows. All the people looking at you, and making critical remarks. No. It is more comfortable to sink your early ambitions, and stay in a back seat.' Here he finished his tumbler, and instantly began to tackle the wire of another potash. 'I say, my boy, did you observe—

well, but did you not—how the two girls took the news to-night ?

‘What two girls ?’

‘Why, the girl he is engaged to—and the girl he ought to be engaged to,’ said Mr. Pinder, with looser grammar than is becoming to a critic.

‘What do you mean ?’

‘I’ve known Kit all his life, and you haven’t. The girl that ought to be his wife nearly cried with joy—she’s the girl that loves him. The girl that’s going to be his wife said she didn’t believe it—she doesn’t care, you see, whether he’s going to be a great man or not. Women are rum cattle—very rum.’

Denny got up and walked to the bookcase. When he returned, without a book, his face was very red.

‘What are you saying about the girls ?’

‘I’ve known Geraldine all her life, and Kit too. Now, if a man must needs get married, and so spoil all the comfort and independence of his life, there’s a girl for you !’

‘Geraldine seems a very good girl,’ said Denny impartially.

‘She is. And she loves that jackass, Kit, with all her soul and all her strength.’

‘Nonsense. They have always been together ; she takes a real and kindly interest in him.’

‘She loves him, I tell you. And she’s a fool for her pains. First, because he used to be a lazy, good-for-nothing beggar, always promising and never performing. And next, because he has now turned into a prig, who treats his old friends to moral maxims. And, if there’s a third reason, it’s because he hasn’t got the sense to see what a splendid creature she is, and so takes up with that little——’

‘Stop ! I say,’ Denny thundered, and brought his fist upon the table so that the glasses jumped for fear.

Mr. Pinder looked at him with wonder. Why this heat ?

‘What the devil are you flying into a rage for ?’ asked the old man after a blank stare. ‘Geraldine isn’t in love with you. The other girl isn’t engaged to you. Can’t a man speak ?’

‘No, no—only—forgive me—Kit is my old friend, and I can’t bear to hear him—and the young lady he is going to marry—talked about in this way. Besides, it is all nonsense. How could Geraldine be in love with him ? They

were brought up together—they have always been together : they are almost brother and sister.'

'Almost, not quite. In these things an inch is as good as a mile. Almost—yes. Why, my friend, I can see it in her eyes. But we will talk no more about it.'

'Good-night,' said Denny, abruptly rising. 'I shall go to bed.'

'You are not going to bed yet? Why, it isn't one o'clock. Oh, Lord! Oh, Lord! How country habits corrupt one. Fancy being in a house with half-a-dozen men, and not one of them out of bed after one o'clock. Well, well. Go to bed, my young friend: I shall have one more potash—or two—or three—and go up presently.'

Denny went to his own room, but he did not immediately go to bed. He walked about, thinking, his mind in a difficulty the like of which had never before happened unto any man. Finally he sat down and wrote a letter :

'MY DEAR KIT,—I have heard a good many surprising things about you to-day. I always knew that you were a lazy beast, and I always suspected, when I could bring my mind to look at things clearly, that you were marked out by Fate for failure, debt, and difficulties. I now hear, to my enormous surprise, that you have in the last three months developed a most surprising change in your habits. You are industrious, and you have already made some kind of name. I am also told that you have changed your old style into something quite new, and not in the least like the old. You are further reported to have cut your friends, and to refuse them when they impetrate a loan. All this promises to be exceedingly awkward in the future.

'Now, as the great Return has to be effected next week, would it not be advisable for us to have a few days together before that event, so as to learn exactly what has been done on both sides? Otherwise there may be many awkward misunderstandings.

'Come to-morrow, in time for dinner. You will find a house full of friends. The girls are in great force.

'Yours, in the bonds of forgery, imposition, and treachery,

DENNY STIRLING.

'P.S.—What the devil do you mean by changing your old style—*my* style?'

CHAPTER V.

KIT'S ARRIVAL.

It was perhaps a pity that Denny forgot to say that he expected Kit; it was certainly a mistake that he did not go to meet him and prepare his mind with the view of avoiding certain accidents which might have been foreseen. But in a situation so unusual, it is difficult to provide against everything.

Unfortunately Denny was entirely occupied with considering this new leaf, turned, not by himself, but by another. Otherwise, he might have given a thought to Rosie.

Now, when the station fly rumbled round the carriage-drive, at six o'clock, those who were playing tennis stopped in their game, and those who were talking or walking about desisted and looked up with natural curiosity as to the new-comer.

It was quickly seen to be none other than Kit Cotterel himself, the man who had grown suddenly serious and plunged unexpectedly into profound depths of philosophy. He actually looked it. Instead of Kit, smiling and nodding to everybody, as was to be expected, had his approaching visit been known, there was seen, sitting well back in the open carriage, turning his head neither to the right nor left, a perfectly grave person approaching a company of complete strangers. The aspect of Kit, as grave as a bishop, caused the unthinking to shout and laugh. When he got out of the vehicle, instead of running round and shaking hands with everybody, he surveyed the company with face unmoved, and disappeared within the house.

'Goodness gracious!' cried Sophia. 'He is playing his new part off the stage. Surely he need not pretend to be so absorbed in meditation as actually not to know us. His eyes fell upon me, and showed not the least recognition. Geraldine, am I grown young and beautiful again, for a miracle, so that I am no longer recognised?'

'You are always young and always beautiful,' said Geraldine. 'Kit is certainly full of thought. I never knew him like this before.'

'My dear, I feel as if a jug of cold water had been poured down my back. We are too frivolous to be recognised. But we shall see him presently, I suppose; and perhaps he will unbend a little. He will not descend quite to the old frivolity, of course; but he will come down a little.'

Kit was taken straight to the library, where Denny awaited him. The young men shook hands; but with a certain constraint,—a little suspicion, or, at least, jealousy, because each had to give an account of his stewardship.

'You are looking very well,' said Denny. 'I think I have never seen you looking better. And of course I ought to know. I hope you find the—the quarters comfortable. They are more roomy than the old ones, though somewhat lower. I suppose you found the increase of capacity round the chest a little strange at first. The thickness of the legs would not trouble you much, nor a certain loss of straightness in those limbs: you find your foothold firmer; and—from certain symptoms—I should say that you found a healthier appreciation of drinks. Indeed, I sincerely hope you have been quite comfortable.'

'Perfectly, perfectly: I am quite satisfied with the accommodation. And you?'

'I have been very well, thanks. I was rather too tall at first, and found I knocked my hat about a good deal under the trees. And there was a little difficulty in persuading the organs to adapt themselves to certain habits requiring stronger action. I need only hint that you will find yourself capable of much more wine and Scotch whisky than before.'

'Quite unnecessary,' said Kit with some severity.

'No excess, you know; only good cheer and a healthy appetite. One is stouter, I think, in consequence. As for you, I think that you have fined down the lines somewhat. Face and figure alike are thinner. But that may be considered—by some—an improvement.'

'It is certainly an improvement. A complete change in the habits of life has produced the effect.'

'Well—well—one can easily go back again. No great harm done, old man.'

'Quite the contrary. You used to sit up half the night smoking more tobacco than was good for you, and drinking a ridiculous quantity of stuff. How *could* you expect any

work to be done with such habits as those? I do not smoke at all, and I go to bed by eleven.'

Denny laughed derisively.

'When I took up my residence,' Kit continued, 'in these lodgings, the hand shook and there was a strong desire for drink every morning.'

'There certainly was. But a single little whisky and soda, first thing in the morning, used to set that right.'

'Those symptoms are now quite gone. There is no more need for a whisky and soda at any time.'

'Oh—well—I suppose it's an improvement,' said Denny doubtfully. 'What do they say at the club?'

'I do not know. I have quite left off going to the club.'

'Left off going to the club?'

'The men, I found, are accustomed to drink at odd times all through the day, and their conversation, though they are mostly literary men, seemed to me extremely unprofitable—all froth and sparkle.'

'What more do you want? Froth and sparkle? Where else, I should like to know, can you get froth and sparkle?'

'In fact, I found that your former associates—'

He paused, as one who does not wish to inflict needless pain.

'I hope to Heaven you did not tell them what you thought of them.'

'There was no necessity. I simply stayed away. I had my work to do.'

'Yes. Somehow I always found time for the club.'

'I gathered from the Editors to whom you were known, that my—your—reputation was that of a man able to turn out light and airy stuff—pleasant for the moment—when he could screw himself up to the point of work. I assured the Editors that their view was a narrow one, and I brought them work of a very different kind. You will, I assure you, find yourself in a vastly improved position. You will never again be expected to write frivolous verse.'

'Oh!'

'Yes. And more than that: you have become an orator.'

'So I hear.'

'And a champion of the greatest cause ever advanced—nothing less than a complete reconstruction of Society—'

'Don't! . . . Thank you very much; but give it out in smaller doses—break it gently!'

'To return, then, to your new habits. I rise every morning at six, and get two solid hours of work before breakfast. After breakfast a sharp walk and then more work until one, when I take a little light lunch.'

'A light lunch.' Denny laughed. 'Man, I used to take a solid steak and a pint of beer, with a pipe or two after it. A light lunch! Why, there is no meal in the day more delightful than a good solid lunch, with a clear run of tobacco and talk after it, till dinner time.'

'A sandwich and a glass of Apollinaris,' said Kit, 'something that will not interfere with work. Then one goes on for an hour or so, after which it is time to go and see my Editor and talk over a subject. If I am to write a leader, I go away and set about it. I can generally get it done by eight—fortunately I am a quick writer. Then, of course, I have some dinner and go home. It is a good day's work, I think,' he added modestly. 'After that I merely make a few notes, look up a reference or two, and so to bed by eleven.'

'Good Heavens! What a life! Why, it is all work—all work. It isn't life—there is no life in it.'

'Don't be ungrateful. Consider what I have done for you. In three months—three short months—I have raised you from an occasional contributor of light articles and verses of Cockney-land to the position of leader-writer on a great daily. Instead of doing a review occasionally, when you could get it, for a weekly, and a poem now and then for a comic journal, you now discuss in the best magazines of the day the Condition of the People and Social Economics.'

'What do I know—what do I care—about the condition of the people?'

'You can read what I have written, which will guide you; and then you must hasten to get up all the information you can find upon the subject. I have laid, in fact, the foundation of a splendid reputation for you, not to speak of fortune.'

'And you've gone and changed my style,' groaned Denny.

'Yes. It was formerly unfinished. Cleverness in it, I

dare say, but sketchy and unfinished. You will find it improved, but, of course, you will have to write up to your new level.'

'Thanks,' said Denny, grinning unmirthfully. 'You have been exceedingly kind. Have you, may I ask, enjoyed making all this mischief?'

'Very much, indeed.' Kit's face lit up; he became once more almost like the old Kit. 'To wake in the morning with the consciousness that only a day or two lies between yourself and destitution: to feel that you have got the work to do which will stave it off, and that you can do it and do it well, really was the most inspiring thing I ever felt.'

'Pity you cannot continue to feel inspired. As for me——'

'The heights where working-men live have a bracing air. And the food which one actually earns—how good it is!'

'Glad you like it.'

'When I began, with about fifteen shillings in my pocket, there were five weeks' bills unpaid to the landlady——'

'More, I should have thought. But you know best. How has she behaved about it?'

'And the table was littered with accounts unpaid.'

'People do get troublesome sometimes. You didn't let them worry you, I hope?'

'Worry me? I had no ease of mind until I had paid them all—every one.'

'Paid them all? Paid my debts? You? How the deuce did you manage that?'

'In the usual way. You do not suppose that I worked for nothing. After all, the bills taken together did not amount to much.'

'No. One blushes, certainly, to think how small is the confidence, how limited the credit, of the individual. Even at the club there is no tick, and they won't cash cheques. But is it true? Am I really square?'

'I believe so, unless there is something behind.'

'My dear fellow, there couldn't be anything behind. My creditors are not the sort to allow anything behind. Well, I shall feel a little strange, at first—cold—without the friendly interest of my creditors, who will make no more

kind inquiries after my progress. This is bad for them, as well as for me.'

'It was my clear duty,' Kit said severely, 'to pay your debts. A man in debt is nothing better than a slave. Until the debts were paid, I confess that I sneaked in and out of the house like a thief. I did not dare to face the woman of the house. I trembled, for fear of her just reproaches.'

'I am out of debt, then. I wonder how long it will last? And money, perhaps, in your pocket?'

'You will find an account opened at the bank: there is something there—say, fifty pounds or so. There are also two or three papers as yet unpaid for.'

'Fifty pounds? Good heavens! Fifty pounds all at one time! Fifty pounds!'

Kit shrugged his shoulders.

'Don't forget, if you please,' he said, 'that you have a character to lose, thanks to me.'

'I feel grateful. As soon as I have lost it, I shall be more grateful still.'

'Well, what have you been doing?'

Denny sat down, and laughed.

'When you know the whole, you will be pleased indeed. You have kept a lovely open house here. No end of deserving young people in distressed circumstances have been having a high old time. There have been feasting, dancing, singing, play-acting, picnics, love-making, and universal happiness for three months.'

'And now they will have to go back again to their humble work, and be made discontented for life.'

'They were discontented before. I've done more—but you will find out when you come back.'

'You have, in short,' interposed Kit angrily, 'turned the money to the most mischievous purpose possible. Every foolish gift or thing people wish to have, only makes them forget that what they want they must work for.'

'If you had to work, my dear fellow——'

'I have had to work for three months, and it's the healthiest time I have ever had.'

'To be sure, I forgot. Well, that is what I have done. I have increased the happiness of people by giving them something pleasant to remember. And, as for you, I have

created for you a character for general benevolence and good-nature, which you will find, I take it, as pleasant as it is unexpected.'

'Benevolence! I hate the very name. There ought to be no such thing as benevolence. Well, go on.'

'No, my dear friend. I will not go on. Meantime, you will meet your friends, these girls and people, at dinner.'

'I thought,' said Kit, in agitation, 'that you would only spend the money on your own amusements.'

'And I thought you would just pawn my watch, and borrow half-sovereigns, and get on anyhow.'

'I was a fool,' said Kit, 'not to have guarded against this.'

'Perhaps you were. That reflection brings me comfort. I've had a glorious time, too. To wake up in the morning with the thought that there is no work to be done but to enjoy yourself: and if you think of anyone in trouble, all you've got to do is to help him out of it. Why, it's godlike! It brings out a warm glow all over. Only a few days more, and I go back to the life which you have poisoned with your confounded activity.'

'And I to the life which you have ruined by your abominable benevolence.'

They stood facing each other, hands in pocket, chins stuck out, snorting a kind of defiance.

'Take care,' said Denny. 'Fair words, my friend. There are still a few days left. Still time left to pauperise half London. Serve you right, too, for changing my style.'

'If you come to that, there is time to engage you for half-a-dozen more articles, which you will not be able to write. You and your confounded benevolence! What right had you——'

They snorted again, and glared at each other with such sudden boiling-over of wrath as, in the old days, would have impelled them to rush at each other with any weapon handy, such as a chair—which was beautiful either for defence or offence—or a poker or an umbrella—the article was formerly made strong for the purpose—or even with fists and feet. Next day they might have had a duel, or they might not, according to the courage of the assaulted party. This uncertainty lent additional attraction to the fight. Now that there are no duels there is no fighting,

and though young men sometimes quarrel, their wrath is left a half-completed tale. The cheeks of these two, however, were red, their eyes flamed, their lips were parted and their nostrils dilated, just as if they were actually going to fight.

How the situation would have ended I know not. I fear, however, that it would have ended tamely, with a walk off in opposite directions. But at this moment a diversion was effected of a most surprising and unforeseen character, which altered, suddenly and completely, the whole situation.

CHAPTER VI.

THE UNEXPECTED.

FOR at this moment the door flew open and Rosie appeared. 'Kit!' she cried. 'Oh! you have actually come, and without letting me know you were coming!'

There was nearly the whole length of the library between them. She came flying down the room, her eyes bright, her lips parted, her cheeks glowing, the sunniest, joyfullest, lovingest greeting on her brow, her hands outstretched, a welcome in every line of her slight and dainty figure. What lover in all the world but would have rushed to meet her, and to enfold in his manly arms so sweet a girl?

Alas! There could be but one. Denny, it is true, turned quickly, as if he was the welcomed lover: he checked himself, however, blushing a violent brick-red; and as for Kit, he looked round with lack-lustre eyes, and made no movement at all—not a step, not a word, not a sign of greeting.

Nobody has ever seen such a thing, except, of course, at rehearsals, where, if something goes wrong in the love scene, the lover and the maiden alike have to let the love-light die suddenly out of their faces, to drop their passionate arms, and to stand aside till the point has been settled. But this was no rehearsal: this was a scene in the real Comedy of a woman's Life. Rosie caught the dull, stupid look, void of recognition: the light and joy suddenly vanished from her face: her hands dropped: she stood quite still, wonder-stricken.

For her lover's face plainly asked, 'Who is this girl? I do not know her.'

'Kit!' she cried, 'what is the matter?'

Kit looked from her to Denny, and back again. But he replied never a word.

'Kit! Kit! what is it?'

She shrank back as if she had received a blow.

'Pull yourself together, man!' cried Denny, roughly taking him by the shoulders and shaking him. 'Are you only half awake? You will excuse him directly, Rosie,' he said. 'It is only a momentary weakness.' It might have occurred to Rosie that to shake a man violently by the shoulder is unwise treatment for momentary weakness. 'Wake up, Kit! Can't you see that it is Rosie—Rosie Romaine?'

'Oh! yes—yes—Miss Romaine, of course.'

'Is he ill? Oh! Mr. Stirling—Denny—what in the world has happened to him?'

'I don't know. Man! don't go off again.'

'I am broad awake, thank you. Nothing has happened,' Kit said, coldly and slowly, with vengeful face turned to the other.

'There, again—you can't have forgotten!' cried Denny.

'Pull yourself together, I say.'

'No—no—certainly not. Pray forgive me—Miss Romaine.'

Denny whispered something in his ear—something short and strong—but the girl heard it.

'I think I had better go,' she said. 'I am sorry I came at all. You seem to have been drinking, Kit, or you are gone mad—one of the two—and whichever it is—'

'No—no'—for now he perceived that he had really made some stupendous blunder—'I am not mad—nor am I drunk—I assure you. The fact is——' he turned to Denny for support or explanation. 'Help me out, can't you!' he cried, in desperation. 'You have got me into the mess—help me out!'

'Help him out!' cried Rosie. 'What does he mean? what can he mean?'

'Yes—yes,' said Denny. 'It is my fault. He arrived tired and overcome—I ought to have insisted on his taking rest—or a drink—or something. Instead of that—I am a

blundering idiot, I confess—I brought him here to talk over business—and in our discussion—he has been greatly over-worked, which I ought to have known—only last night we were talking about it—you remember, Rosie. The papers in the *Contemporary*, you know, and the speeches about the new thingumbob—you remember—and a great deal more that we did not know—change of style—a thing by itself that would kill most men—break-up with old associates——’

He paused, partly out of breath, and partly for lack of invention. The most experienced inventor often has to consider what next.

‘Pray go on,’ said Rosie, looking at her shame-stricken lover. ‘He has worked so hard that he has forgotten the girl who promised to marry him—wonderful effect of hard work, truly!’

‘No—no—no; you misunderstand,’ said Denny. ‘What I was coming to was this, that while we were discussing a certain point we disagreed—disagreed—you know; in the heat of argument people frequently disagree——’

‘And so he forgets his friends!’

‘And all of a sudden Kit fell down in a fit. I had just picked him up when you came in. He was slowly recovering consciousness—of course he didn’t know you. But he is better—you are much better, Kit, now—are you not? Eh? steady—steady.’ He seized his friend by the waist as if he was going off again—and pinched him in the fattest and tenderest part of the arm—so that he jumped. ‘Shake hands with her,’ he whispered—but the girl heard again. ‘Call her Rosie.’

‘Pray forgive me—Rosie,’ said Kit, coldly extending an uncertain hand, while his face still betrayed an utter absence of recognition.

She refused his hand with a gesture of indignation.

‘Is he somebody else?’ she asked.

‘I should have thought so myself,’ Denny replied, ‘if it hadn’t been for that fit. Don’t hurry him. He will come to himself again presently. Don’t hurry him.’

‘How could he actually forget me?’

‘Such a fit—it is of uncommon occurrence, and only comes to people when they have worked too hard—is sufficient to account for anything.’

'I am remembering again,' said Kit, lending a hand at last. 'Have I been saying anything foolish?'

'Let me look at you, Kit,' said the girl. 'Oh, you are very far from remembering yet. I should say, from your manner, that you have been drinking. That is my explanation—and if so—'

'No—no—I never drink.'

'He never drinks—now.' Denny still interpreted. 'Formerly he had a praiseworthy swallow—now he never drinks. We must forget this painful incident. Lay the blame on me. The nervous system is easily shaken, and once out of gear—you know—'

'He is as strong as a bull,' said the girl. 'He is out of this mysterious fit—now, at any rate—and look at him. Why, he doesn't know me yet. Kit—Kit—Mr. Arthur Christopher Cotterel—are you clean out of your senses?'

'No—no—I shall be all right presently—not to know you—Miss Romaine—Rosie—'

'Miss Romaine, again? Oh! it is too ridiculous. You are playing with me, sir.'

'No—no,' he murmured.

'I assure you,' said Denny, 'that what has happened—'

'I want his explanation, Denny, not yours,' said the girl. 'Why, he looks at me still as if he wondered who I am. Let me refresh your memory, sir. I am Rosie Romaine, and I live at Chelsea, and I am a painter—a water-colour painter—and you, after assuring me that you were in love with me, made me promise to marry you. I have had letters every other day from you for the last three months: one came yesterday morning, in which you said absolutely nothing about coming here. Now—have you anything further to say? Do not help him, Denny, if you please, to make up anything. Let him speak.'

'No,' said Denny. 'Let him keep silence till he has recovered.'

'Well, I will leave him. To stay with him in his present condition is impossible. Understand, sir, that I must have from yourself, and not from Denny, or any other friend, an explanation of this—this outrage.'

'Yes,' Denny murmured in wrath irrepressible, 'it is an outrage—it is nothing short of an outrage.'

'Then, sir'—she continued to address her lover, who

stood with hanging head, not daring to say a word—'when you are able to talk rationally, I shall be ready to listen. Till then——'

She turned and swept out of the room with the dignity of an offended Queen—but with trembling lips. When she reached her own room, and not till she had shut and bolted the door, she sat down to cry. Kit loved her no longer—that was certain: his face, his eyes, his words, his manner—all showed he had actually clean forgotten her. Was ever girl more cruelly insulted? And from her pocket she drew her last letter in the dear old handwriting—with the dear old phrases—ending with the dear old words, 'I love you—I love you—I love you.' Oh! the fond lover! And the next day he had forgotten her. He must be ill—something terrible—some sudden shock must have happened. And her heart presently softened. Kit could never have behaved in such a strange manner unless he was suffering from something—never—it wasn't possible. She would wait and hear what he had to say.

'Confound it all!' cried Denny, stamping his foot, when she was gone. 'This is the most unlucky chance—the most frightful accident—that could have happened. Couldn't you see, man? How on earth . . . Here's a girl comes rushing into the room with her arms out, and calls you by your Christian name, and you stare at her like a blank idiot——'

'How was I to know?'

'Why, you donkey, you are engaged to her!'

'Well, you ought to have told me before I came. It is all your fault.'

'Engaged—now you see what you've done. You've made me look as if I'd forgotten my own sweetheart. That's all—forgotten my girl—the sweetest and most lovable little girl that ever lived. That's all! Great heavens! That's all!'

'Well, why didn't you tell me?' Kit repeated stolidly.

'Because I wasn't going to have you going about in my shape to make love to her.'

'Well, then, why did you send for me here?'

'I forgot what might happen. I do forget sometimes. It's the awkwardness of this business that one has to be always remembering, and guarding against things.'

'Well, the only question now is, What is to be done?'

'I don't know. Make up something. Go on having giddy fits. Be overworked. Go on being giddy. Reel about. Stagger.'

'I will do what I can,' Kit replied gravely. 'The situation is delicate, I confess.'

'Delicate or not, you have got to get out of it, somehow. Mind, you must—you must—you must.'

'Am I to make love to her? I don't want to; but if you think I ought—'

'I suppose——' Denny changed colour—'I suppose you must—to a certain extent—pretend. There will be a row royal in any case. Perhaps it would be better to let things slide till this week is over. But she won't allow it. She means to have it out at once. Well, I suppose,' he concluded doubtfully, 'that you must make love.'

'Oh!' Kit looked more doubtful still. 'I don't like to ask impertinent questions, my dear fellow—but in these matters—want of experience. . . . One would like to know how far one may go—what is expected and allowed.'

'Here's a chap!' cried Denny. 'One would think he had never made love to a girl in his life. Oh! I would get up and confess the whole business if I thought she would believe it. But she wouldn't. She would think it was a put-up job. No woman would ever be got to believe it.'

'After all, it's only a lovers' quarrel. She'll make it up and come round fast enough, when we've had a little explanation. I shall tell her about that fit again.'

'Will she come round? If I know that sweet girl, it won't be quite so easy. Hang it all! not to recognise your own girl—and, mind,—she doesn't believe in that fit. She thinks you are drunk—I saw it in her eyes. She didn't believe a word about the fit from the beginning.'

'Well, I will do what I can. Of course I must call her by her Christian name—Rosie? Who is Rosie? How long have I been engaged? Tell me all and make haste about it. A very pretty interruption to work this job promises to be.'

'And mind,' said Denny, after impressing these and other points upon him, 'the house is full of your old friends. Don't pretend not to know them. Don't be standoffish

with them, because they don't expect such treatment, and they won't have it, and they'll visit it upon me next week if they get it now.'

'Well, tell me beforehand who they are.'

'There's dear old Sophia Gentry, the painter.'

'Never heard of her.'

'Well then, pretend to have heard of her—shake hands warmly with her. You may kiss her, if you like. I think, indeed, she will expect it. Everybody kisses Sophia.'

'I don't want to kiss her.'

'There's Geraldine—tall, good-looking girl—remember you've been friends from childhood. She'll want a little private talk—and you must tell her everything. But you mustn't try to kiss her, because she isn't that kind of girl at all—even with her oldest friends. Well, then there's old Pinder, to whom you refused the loan of half-a-sovereign the other day. You'll find him rather distant in consequence.'

'A disagreeable-looking old man with a red face and a loud voice? I remember him. No—I should certainly not lend that man anything.'

'Well, then there are others—mind you laugh as if you were glad to see them. Oh! and as for Rosie—but it is too late for you to explain anything before dinner. You will sit next to her, and you had better sigh and let her understand that you are getting slowly better. Don't drink anything but Apollinaris. That'll convince her, if anything can, how ill you have been. Kit Cotterel must be very far gone indeed when he lets the champagne pass him—or the claret either—or the port—or the sherry. Oh! Lord—Lord! how shall I ever make it up with Rosie? Poor child! Poor child!'

CHAPTER VII.

WHAT HAS COME TO HIM?

KIT obeyed his instructions in so far, that he came down to dinner late—so late, that they did not wait for him. He dropped into his place, which was next to Rosie on one side and to Sophia on the other, with a smile and a bow to the latter—who took his hand and held it affectionately.

'My dear boy,' she murmured, 'we are all so proud of you. I must learn all about it after dinner.'

But there was something in his manner which chilled her, and she dropped his hand, looking at him with surprise. The others all welcomed him as 'Kit the Philosopher—Kit the Preacher—Kit the Moralist,' laughing as if the new character was a really excellent joke. He laughed in reply, but coldly, as one who would be taken seriously. But Mr. Pinder regarded him with offended dignity. As for Rosie, she addressed not one word to him, but conversed with animation with the man on the other side. This was remarked, naturally. Again, it was remarked that Kit not only told no stories, but laughed at none. Nothing could be a greater proof of radical change in him than the fact that he neither told stories nor laughed at them. Finally, if more proof was wanted of his changed condition, it was observed that he drank nothing. A small bottle of Apollinaris stood before him, which he did not finish. The sparkling wine and the claret he refused.

'Kit,' said Sophia, 'you have grown silent. Can you not leave London and your work behind you?'

'I have brought my work with me.'

'Oh, but you must rest and take a holiday.'

'I have a good deal to finish within the next three days. After that, I cannot tell'—he sighed—'how much holiday I may take.'

'Well, Kit—but we are not always working. Not at dinner, for instance. Where are your old spirits? Where are your stories? Why are you so stiff with your old friends?'

'Am I stiff? Indeed, I am sorry.'

'Look at Denny. You seem to have given him all your spirits when you gave him your songs.'

'Perhaps I did. Don't you see that when one's mind is occupied with really serious things, it is impossible to be always laughing and telling stories?'

'In your case,' said Sophia dryly, 'it would seem so. But you should not fall into the opposite extreme. There is such a thing, my dear Kit, as a wet blanket.'

In fact, although Denny did his best to keep up a cheerful flow of talk, there was a shadow upon the table caused by the presence of this transformed butterfly, who was now a

Philosopher. From grub to butterfly we know, but not from butterfly to grub.

But when they went into the drawing-room the shadow seemed for the moment removed. They all, except Rosie, flocked round Kit. 'Oh, Kit!' cried one. 'Come, Kit!' cried another. 'Now, Kit,' cried a third, 'sit down and sing one of your old songs. Denny sings them all, and so exactly like you, that we want to know which sings them the better. One of your old songs, Kit.'

They led him, passive, to the piano, and made him sit down on the music-stool before he had time to refuse. He even went so far as to touch the keys with his fingers, then he started up—remembering that he could not play or sing a note—not even after the manner of the young man who lives next door, and interprets the finest music with softness, colour, and sympathy by the aid of the forefinger alone.

'No,' he said—'not to-night.'

'Oh! yes—you must—you must. Ask him, Rosie.'

'If you cannot make him, I cannot,' said Rosie coldly.

'I neither play nor sing at all,' he said blankly.

They all burst out laughing. This, indeed, was about as bold and impudent a falsehood as was ever uttered. Why, the man was bubbling over with music of the soft and sentimental kind; of the Bacchanalian kind, or of the love kind—willingly at all times would Kit sit down to sing hymns, Ancient and Modern, in praise of Venus or of Bacchus—of love and wine. And as he sang, his light voice rolling above the rippling of the notes, his face would shine and beam, and his lips would so laugh and he would be so happy in the exercise of his power, that everybody loved him. And Denny behaved in exactly the same manner with equal enjoyment and equal command of the instrument, and with the same laughing eyes, so that the people were divided in opinion which of them played and sang the better. Mostly they found a superior delivery in Denny's rendering, and some thought that he played with greater finish. I believe that the superiority was due to personal comeliness, in which point, without doubt, Denny had the advantage. And if only for his singing, Denny was now as popular as Kit had been. No young man is so universally beloved, as he who can play and sing with ease

and freedom, and as if he enjoyed it himself as much as his hearers. Witness the popularity of Mr. Corney Grain, who really must enjoy his own singing and playing, just as much as the people whose mouths he keeps open and whose eyes he keeps dancing.

'I cannot play,' he repeated, without laughing.—'I mean I cannot play to-night. I have no voice—and I—I had a little indisposition—a giddy fit—after I arrived this evening'—he looked towards Rosie, who cruelly kept her face averted—'and, in fact, I must not attempt any music to-night.'

'You have had an upset of some kind,' said Sophia, 'that is very certain.'

'Quite certain,' said Denny. 'Of course you must not play or sing to-night. Rest for a few days is what you want. Don't think, Kit, of trying to sing. Next week as much as you please. I'll sing you a song—one of your own songs, Kit—written before you began to instruct the world from the pages of the *Contemporary*.'

He sat down and ran his fingers over the keys lightly and pleasantly—this preliminary touch of the fingers is like the kiss of two lovers—and then he sang.

'It is exactly as Kit himself used, to-night,' said Sophia Gentry. 'I have heard him sing that song a dozen times. Denny, have you no style of your own?'

'No, only a variation here and there of Kit's. You don't mind, Kit, do you? You wouldn't like your style changed—would you? Not even to be improved?'

Then Mr. Pinder bore down upon him with the demand for an explanation written plainly on his face.

'We haven't seen you lately at the club,' he began.

'No—I have been too much occupied of late to spare the time. I cannot waste my time, as some men do, in idle talking at the club.'

'It is a great pity, sir, let me tell you,' said Mr. Pinder savagely, 'when young men give up habits of good fellowship, and pretend that work is the only thing for which they were brought into the world. A very great pity, sir, let me tell you.'

He retired without asking, or obtaining, any more explanation. But this kind of talk does not promote cheerfulness. There fell a constraint upon the party. The people

looked at Kit with increasing wonder. It was a miracle. Like all miracles, it would not last long. Presently, they thought, he would change again into his old self: he would sit down and begin tinkling the piano and singing one of the songs for which he was so famous. It was not in Kit's nature to keep serious very long. They would wait.

Nobody said these things, but everybody thought them. One of them, however—Geraldine—took him quite seriously.

She sat down beside him when he had extricated himself from those who wished him to sing, and began talking to him in a confidential voice—not a whisper, but a low tone which is not intended for the whole world to hear. A young lady can only talk so to a man if she is a very old and intimate friend, almost a sister.

'Kit,' she said, 'tell me truly—is it a settled change of purpose, or only a passing fancy?'

'It has been settled for three months,' he replied. 'If it will last another week, I should say that it will always continue. You know'—he smiled gravely—'there are crises and dangerous points in everything—we are now on the verge of a very important crisis indeed.'

'Your look is settled, Kit: your eyes are grave. These are very good signs. Oh! you are so very right. It was indeed time to throw off the indolent trifling which affected your friends so much. Life cannot be all singing and telling stories. But you must not give up singing altogether, for the sake of those who love to hear you.'

'I shall sing again in a few days, I dare say.'

'After the crisis is weathered? And what does Rosie say?'

'She finds me changed, he said shortly.'

'Why, so do all of us. Of course you are changed, but for the better. We are proud of you, remember that—ten times as proud of you as when you thought it the finest thing in the world to go to the club and sing your songs to the men there.'

At this moment Denny began to sing another of the ditties. Truth to tell, the lines of the ditty had just a little touch of the music-hall about them, and there was a tag or refrain which also suggested that Institution for the formation of national taste.

'No, Kit,' said Geraldine, 'I was wrong. You must give

up singing these songs: they would be incongruous for you henceforward. A man who writes on such subjects and in such a style—a man who addresses crowded audiences on grave and important questions—cannot sing those songs any more. Promise me to sing them no more.'

'Ask me next week; I cannot promise anything just now.'

'Let Denny go on singing them: they suit his light and sparkling character. He is like a bottle of champagne, so full of life and spirit. But they suit you no longer. The songs seem part of him; he is of a disposition so sunny, so generous, and so—so like what you wished formerly to seem, Kit. The verses are all about happiness and sunshine and feasting: they suit a man like him, who is so rich and has no sense of responsibility: he laughs at effort: if he sees suffering, he relieves it on the spot: and he is quite as lazy as ever you were, Kit.'

'Or ever will be again,' he replied, smiling.

This young lady, he now perceived, was an extremely beautiful girl, quite unlike the pretty little creature upon whom his clumsy hoofs had trampled. She was tall and stately: she possessed a countenance of great beauty, set and serious. She sat close beside him and talked with a sisterly affection and sympathy, very delightful to any young man, particularly to one who had never seen or spoken to her before.

'I wanted to speak to you as soon as I could, Kit. I wanted to come directly after Rosie, you know, just to tell you how happy the change has made me. Oh! I have been waiting so long, looking for the Kit of the old days, the brave boy who was filled with noble ambition and lofty ideals, and nourished with the greatest thoughts and words of the greatest men. I knew very well that he would come back to us some day. Such a boy might wander out of the way; he might stay down below in the valleys for a while, but he would be sure to climb upon the mountains again. I waited, and I had patience, because I was so certain that he would come back to his old dreams.'

Kit murmured something. The girl's deep eyes spoke volumes of joy and gratitude for the return of the Prodigal.

'The frivolous, idle dreamer, the indolent Kit of the last five years, has quite gone, has he not? Quite, quite gone. Never to return——'

'I cannot say; ask me again in a few days, in a week.'

'When this terrible crisis shall have passed? But, remember, you have always told me everything.'

'It is so long,' he murmured, 'since we have known each other, is it not?'

'Why, Kit, all our lives we have played and talked together—since I was a little girl of three and you a boy of eight.'

'Yes, so long—so long. We are such old friends, Geraldine. I fear—I tremble——'

'Why?'

'I fear that the frivolous idler and dreamer may return. In a few days you may see him back again.'

'Be true to yourself, Kit, and this can never happen.'

He shook his head.

'I tremble,' he said, 'Geraldine, even with you at my side——'

'With me at your side? But you always have that, if you choose—and, besides, you have Rosie.'

There was not the smallest touch of suspicion or jealousy in her voice. She meant what she said:

'You love Rosie: she will make you happy.'

'Even if I had you,' he added, with a look of admiration in his eyes that had never belonged to the old Kit. Indeed, in these old boy and girl confidences there never is any admiration on the part of the boy, though there may be plenty of worship on the part of the man. 'Even if you were always at my side, I should tremble to think what might happen. Because, you see, what I have done has now advanced to a stage where a strong man is required; and I know not whether I have the strength, the courage, or the perseverance to continue the work.'

'There is a touch of Kit the dreamer—not Kit the man of action. Strength? You are full of strength. Nobody knows your intellectual strength better than I do. There is nothing, Kit—nothing in the world—that you cannot do, if you only choose.'

Denny interrupted them.

'Rosie is in the library,' he said. 'Will you go to her. Kit?'

He administered a warning frown, as Kit rose quickly and departed.

'What is the matter with them, Denny?' asked Geraldine. 'Everybody noticed that they hardly spoke to each other during dinner.'

'Rosie came running into the library at a most unfortunate moment. Kit, you see, was over-heated, or overdone, or something, and he had a sudden giddiness—nearly fell over—had to sit down—kind of fit.'

'Kind of fit? That seems alarming. Kit never had such a thing before.'

'No? Comes of hard work—that kind of fit. Those articles, you know. Well, Rosie came at the moment when he was just recovering. And, in fact, for the moment he did not recognise her—seemed not to know who she was—and she was a little put out; thought it was neglect. Now he's gone to make it up with her. Five minutes will square it. Lord! they've had a hundred quarrels. She was always flying out at him for laziness and debts and late hours. And they always kissed and made friends again. I'll give Kit ten minutes to make it right.'

CHAPTER VIII.

LET ME EXPLAIN.

'Now, sir,' said Rosie, tapping her foot impatiently.

'You saw what happened,' he began.

'Saw what happened? Of course I did. Saw what happened? Pray, sir, if you knock a man down with a bludgeon, do you begin your apologies by asking him if he felt what happened?'

'Please let me go on. I am all impatience, Rosie, to set this matter straight.'

'Go on.' She turned her head aside as if she could not bear even to look at him. She was in a tempestuous mood which Kit's strange behaviour about the singing had not gone far to calm.

'I was going to say that when you came into the room—I was not, for the moment, myself.'

'That you need not tell me. The question is how long it will be before you are again yourself?'

'I am now—again—myself,' he replied; but with a faltering voice, because he felt that the statement would hardly bear defence.

'No, Mr. Cotterel, you are not. And until you can make me understand what this means—what is the reason of this conduct——'

'Indeed, I do not know in what words to assure you of my sorrow and pain—at what must, I own, seem incomprehensible——'

'Sir—you only make things worse.' She drew herself up and spoke in the iciest tones. 'You now say that you have come to your senses, and that you know at last the girl to whom you are engaged. You recognise her again. Why, it is I now who do not know you. Where are you gone? What has become of you? What evil spirit possesses you? Why do you speak to me like this?'

He made no reply.

'Have you any complaint to make of me? Have I offended you in any way? If so, it must be since the day before yesterday, when I received your last letter. Here it is.' She drew a letter from her pocket. 'Perhaps you will at least remember writing this letter. Look at it. That is your handwriting and that is your signature, I believe.'

'Yes—yes—of course I remember very well. Am I to read it?'

'Read it aloud.'

'"Dearest and best of girls——"'

'Am I the dearest and best of girls?'

'Certainly. Of course you are.'

At this point he should have dropped the letter and taken her in his arms and had no more discussion. But this, unfortunately, he neglected to do. The old Kit, whenever they quarrelled, always made it up that way, and perhaps Rosie expected a repetition of the treatment.

'Either you are telling the most shameful of falsehoods,' she said, 'or you have acquired quite a new manner of telling the truth. I don't like the new manner. Go on!'

'"Dearest and best of girls—I have nothing to tell you—no news to give you—except that I am——"'

'Stop! You had no news to give me. You had been writing all these papers—you were going to make a great

speech—you were coming down here on a visit—you had caused yourself to be talked about—and you say that you have no news to tell me! Really, I think you must be clean gone off your head.'

'No news—I meant—that would interest you.'

'You think so meanly of the woman who is—or was—to be your wife, that you do not even tell her such news as that of your own complete transformation. And this is the man who used to tell me everything!'

'I meant to surprise you—'

'No—no. You didn't care enough for me to tell me anything. Go on. Finish your letter.'

'“No news,”’ he went on, “except I am always and always and always, with ten thousand kisses, your lover—your lover—your lover.”’

'Do you mean that still?' asked Rosie, giving him a second chance for the familiar treatment.

'Certainly—of course—why not?' he replied. 'I assure you—'

'Yes; but you needn't assure me. You have now recovered. What is the good of all those assurances when I can see with my own eyes the change in your manner and in your looks? Kit'—she turned upon him fiercely—'you no longer love me! Now, don't protest and assure—because it is no use. Good gracious! Do you think I cannot see very well? Have I no eyes? Have I no memory? You no longer love me! Tell me—I ask again—have I offended you in any way?'

'No—no—no—not in the least.'

'Then how *can* you write in the old manner one day and two days afterwards meet me with such a change?'

'I can only explain as I have already tried. I have been too busy, perhaps, to think much of such things.'

'Too busy? But you have written to me every other day.'

'Yes—yes—no doubt. But—'

'And long letters, too. It was by your advice that I came here when Geraldine asked me to come with her.'

'You see—it was a sudden thing—a kind of fit.'

'Don't, Kit,' she said earnestly. 'Do not add more falsehoods to the pile you have already heaped up. I wonder'—she pressed her head with her hands—'if we are

both in our senses. We can't be—I must be mad or you must be mad. Do you suppose I believe that story about giddiness? You were not giddy. You simply did not know me. Oh! what can it mean? What can it mean? What has happened?

'What should happen?' His voice was constrained.

'It is so terrible that I am frightened,' said the girl. 'My own lover does not know me. When he hears who I am, his eyes follow me about as if trying to make out who I am. He sits beside me at dinner and says nothing—and when I look into his eyes I find that the old look has gone out of them. The man has actually forgotten the girl whom but yesterday he said he loved.'

'No—no—Rosie'—he pronounced the name with an effort—'I am not really changed. You are mistaken. It is only that I have been greatly occupied and perhaps overworked, and—and—you will forgive me, Rosie. I will go away again to-morrow, and come back in a day or two—next week—and you will find me the old Kit again. Will you forgive me?'

As if remembering what is due from an accepted suitor, he made an attempt, but feebly, to lay his hand upon her waist. The girl shook him off with a shudder.

'No, Kit—not with that look in your eyes. No! It is all over between us. You can leave me now. It is all over, I say.'

'All over?'

'Well, why doesn't the man go? I say it is all over—all over—all over,' she repeated, raising her voice. 'Good gracious! what did you expect? What did you want? Do you think that after—— Oh, it is absurd! Go away, if you please, Mr. Cotterel.'

'Oh, I say!'—Kit seemed to awaken suddenly—'I must set this right somehow. Look here—Rosie—well, then—if it must be—it was unfortunate that he sighed at this point, because a sigh is often the outward sign of inward satisfaction—if it must be—don't send me away like this. Let me go away to-morrow—as I proposed—and come back in a week. You will see then. I promise you faithfully that I have not changed.'

'He doesn't understand—even yet—the enormity of the thing he has done!' cried the girl. 'He *can't* understand it.'

'Give me a week. It is all I ask.'

'No—I will not. But—well, something is due; there may be something to explain—some way out of it. I will give you two days. If, in two days' time—'

'It is too soon. I want a week.'

'If in two days' time I see the old look back again—then—then—perhaps I will ask you for explanations. If you've fallen in love with some other girl,' she added coldly, 'of course it would be much better to tell me so at once, and have done with it. If not, in two days I shall expect the old look back again.'

'The old look? Now—I ask you, how can I compel the old look to come back if it won't? Where is it—the old look? A man can't alter his eyes.'

'I will give you two days,' she repeated—'two days more. If by the end of that time you are not again the old Kit—why, all will be over between us. Do you quite understand? Two days.'

'Make it six,' he said with the air of one who pleads with his uncle for a higher advance. 'Only make it six, and I am sure—oh! I am quite sure—that the old look will come back.'

'Oh! you cannot be in your right senses. This is absurd. Why make it six? No. If in two days I do not see the old look and hear the same voice—'

'You don't mean that the voice is changed as well as the eyes!'

'Your eyes are the same as they always have been. They are common gray eyes. Quite,' she added icily, 'of the common kind. And your voice is the same, I suppose—rather a high pitch in it, nothing unusual in your voice. You have the same face, too—not an uncommon face—and not a very beautiful face either. Your nose is much the same—short and broad—and your mouth hasn't greatly changed in three months. It never had any shape to speak of—'

'Pray go on,' he said.

'Your figure is much the same as it used to be,' Rosie added,—'short and thick. I certainly did not accept your hand because anything that belonged to it was beautiful. As for your manners, they are not aristocratic. And as for your customs, they are lazy and shiftless.'

'Well?'

'Seeing all these things—that I took you in spite of everything and knowing everything that I had to expect—I can only say that if my promised lover comes to me, after three months' absence, with all the love gone out of him—out of his eyes, out of his voice, out of his face, out of his manner—why, he may give me back my promise and go away. For I will have no more of him. And that is the last word.'

'No more of him,' he repeated.

'No more of him. Two days, therefore, I give you. Two days. During that time you will not walk with me, sit beside me, talk to me, write to me, or use any of the privileges of a lover. A lover? Oh! With that voice and with those eyes! And not to know me again! Not to remember me!'

She ran away, leaving him alone. She ran out of the library into the garden.

'I am sorry for Kit,' he murmured. 'I really am sorry for Kit. But it's his own fault. Why couldn't he have come to town instead of making me come down here?'

Was it by accident, or was it by design, that Denny was on the terrace when Rosie ran out from the library?

'You have seen him?' he whispered. 'You have made it all right with him?'

'No, I have not. You will please not to ask me anything about him at all. Something dreadful has happened to Kit.' The tears rose to her eyes, but she brushed them away for pride's sake. 'I wonder if he has been so horribly hard up that he can think of nothing but his debts?'

'He has no debts. He has paid them all and he's coining money. Fifty pounds he has accumulated—actually, fifty pounds! Why, it is opulence—and all for your sake.'

'Mine? For my sake! Please do not let me hear any more falsehoods; I have heard too many already.'

'I could not tell you—about myself—anything but the plain and simple truth. Rosie, I *could* not.'

She broke away and ran down, alone, into the dark garden. Denny looked after her with something like a tear in his eyes.

Then Kit himself came out, looking uncomfortable.

'Well?'

'I've had it out with her,' he replied. 'It isn't well. Look here—you know—you can't expect a man to show in his face and his voice and his eyes that he's in love with a girl he never saw before. They can't do that even on the stage.'

'It's the most blundering business I ever came across. Of course she expected to see—what she always used to see. Besides, if you were half an actor! As for acting, if a man can't fall in love with Rosie at first sight, he isn't a man—he is only a—a—a writing machine.'

'Thank you. But I don't happen to care much about your very little women,' said Kit coldly. 'Venus was five feet six, I believe. In point of fact, I have not fallen in love with Miss Romaine.'

'What did she say?'

'Just exactly what you might expect. She is deeply hurt and offended. As for her forgiving me—or you—I don't see how she can. The thing is too flagrant.'

Denny said something which was really needed in order to satisfy his feelings.

'In a week's time, when you begin to plead with her yourself, I fully expect, old man, that you will get what at your club they call, I believe, the Boot—the Boot. Mind, it is all your own fault. Don't blame me.'

Denny made no reply at all.

'I've begged for a little time. I asked for a week—you understand why. I'm to have two days only. That is all she will give. If, in two days' time, I can give some kind of explanation and can show that I have recovered the old eyes and the old manner—why then, perhaps—Otherwise the Boot, my friend, the Boot!'

CHAPTER IX.

WITH FRIENDS SO OLD.

BREAKFAST began at half-past nine. As a general rule everybody was tolerably punctual at this, as at every other meal. Rosie, for her part, appeared fresh and smiling as if there had been no quarrel or anything at all out of the

common on yestereve. Yet such a thing when it happens is immediately whispered all over the house. The Temple of Fame has, you see, many departments. In the lowest of all, the goddess employs messengers who are made to run about perpetually on domestic business, picking up tittle-tattle, whispering things that happen, things that have not happened, things that ought to have happened, and, above all, things that ought not to have happened, in the ear of everybody in turn. Some of the messengers, however, of this department—those who are very active—are engaged in working up the personal paragraphs for the papers. He who had been told off for special service in this house, therefore, went round industriously to the pillow of every young lady in turn and told her, murmuring in her ear, so that the words sounded like the very breath of her sleeping self:

‘There has been a quarrel between Kit Cotterel and Rosie. He received her to-day as coldly as if he did not even know her. She is very angry and threatens to break it off.’

It must, I say, have been one of these messengers who had conveyed this information in a secret midnight manner, because everybody knew exactly what had happened. Yet Rosie had told nobody except Geraldine and dear old Sophia and one or two more, and these under promise of confidence the most inviolable. Everybody knew it, and all were prepared to meet her as a drooping lily, with murmuring words and the kiss of condolence and some of the luxury of woe.

She walked in, however, with no external signs of wanting sympathy or condolences. A smile was on her lips and resolution sat upon her brow. She took her seat and nodded to everybody with even more than usual sprightliness, and accepted food readily, as if a lovers’ quarrel was apt to make one hungry. This conduct caused universal admiration. Thus, it was felt, should every girl, who knows what is due to herself, receive and resent the coldness of a lover. Where there is no ardour, there can be no love. To hang the head and weep in a corner is unworthy the name of British maiden. Only those who had observant eyes discovered that the girl’s cheek was a little flushed and her eyes a little too bright. But to show no outward sign or token after such a rupture, or, at least, such a very pretty quarrel, is like coming out of a fight without a scratch.

Fortunately the other combatant was not present. He had the grace to stay away. That awkwardness, if any, was spared the poor girl. Kit gave his friends no opportunity of observing how far his coldness was real or fancied, and Denny sat beside the deserted one paying her all the attentions—it was afterwards remembered—of a lover. But she received them passively.

It was the day of the last picnic. They all made haste to talk about it. Every morning they arranged their plans for the day, and divided into parties, and made up matches, games, plays, and the rest of it. But four days more and the holidays would be over. Then, once more to London—once more to the weary round of work—once more to the search for the honest employer, and for the remunerative work—once more, for most of them, short commons in the way of luxuries, and, in the way of social pleasures, starvation. Therefore there was some sadness already hanging over the party—the shadow of approaching change.

As for the unlucky Kit, this absurd lover, who had actually forgotten that he was in love, and knew not even the face of his mistress, he got up earlier than the rest and went forth into the meadows and the stubbles, probably with the hope of warming his poor frozen heart in the sunshine. He did not return until the picnic party had gone. Then he went into the library, sat down at a table, spread out his books and papers, and in one minute became as much absorbed in his work as if there had been no Rosie at all. In fact, there was no Rosie to him. She belonged to the other fellow—it was not his love-quarrel.

Presently the door opened softly and he looked up. It was Geraldine—the girl who had been Kit's ancient and familiar friend. He was safe with her: she it was who applauded the great transformation and was proud of one so industrious.

She walked to his table, her face full of sweet seriousness, and laid her hand affectionately upon his shoulder.

'Kit,' she said, 'when I learned that you were not going to join the party, I thought I would stay at home too, so that we might have a good talk together about many things. Are you too busy for a little talk?'

'I am always busy,' said this working bee, 'but never too busy for you, Geraldine.'

'Fancy you always busy! It is too delightful. Oh, the change! Tell me how it came about—this wonderful transformation.'

'Well—as I said before—at twenty-seven one has played long enough.'

'That hardly seems a sufficient reason. Never mind, the thing has happened, and oh! dear Kit, we are so proud of you, and so happy!' Her eyes became humid. 'The lazy and careless time is over and gone—all our disappointments are ended—that is enough.'

She would have said more, but her voice broke. She laid her hand upon his and pressed the back of it—quite a sisterly method of hand-pressing.

'You think too much about it, Geraldine,' he said.

'No, no; I cannot think too much about it. Come—tell me, first, what you are writing—verses?'

'No, certainly not. What I am doing here—I have only two or three days to finish it in, I must make haste—is a paper on a question of Colonization. I studied it on the spot—that is to say, I have got all the information as near first-hand as possible.'

'Put it aside for five minutes, and tell me, Kit, what is this trouble about Rosie?'

'What is it?' he repeated.

'You know, of course, that she is excessively hurt and pained by your coldness.'

'I believe she must be. I am sorry.'

'She came to my room last night and had a great cry about it. She says you actually did not know her.'

'I told her—I explained.'

'And she says that you love her no longer. What can it mean, Kit?'

'It means what I tried to explain to her—if she would only believe me.'

Well, Kit, explain to me. You have known me long enough and well enough to explain everything to me.'

'It is difficult,' he said, leaning back and dropping his eyes, 'to make things quite clear. You see it is three months since I have seen Rosie.'

The girl remarked that he pronounced her name with an effort, instead of lingering over it fondly.

'Yes: it is three months. But you have written to her

constantly, and always with the most ardent professions.'

'I suppose—force of habit—force of habit,' he repeated with an impatient gesture.

'Well—but, Kit—Kit—what does this mean? Force of habit?'

'When she came running in, my mind was otherwise occupied and I—I—in fact I was not thinking of her, and perhaps I looked—I may have looked for the moment—as if I did not recognise her. Only for the moment, you know.'

'Yes—yes—that is what Rosie tells me. You offered to shake hands with her, but in so cold a manner that she was simply terrified. And she declares that your manner and look all the evening were those of a man talking to a woman to whom he has just been introduced.'

'That is her imagination.'

'Well, but'—she persisted, 'I cannot understand. Do you remember how you came running to me four months ago with the joyful news that Rosie was going to make you happy? Do you remember, my dear boy, how your voice broke and your eyes filled with tears while you told me about her? What has become of all that rapture?'

'Where are the snows of yesteryear? Why tax me with the mood of a day gone by?'

'Is it possible—no, Kit, it is not possible—that you have changed your mind? If that is so——' She broke off, because indeed she did not know how to finish the sentence without a condemnation too grave to be hastily pronounced.

'I asked her for a week—she will only give me two days. I have assured her that if she will only consent to give me a week, everything will come right again. But she won't. That is her obstinacy, you see. If she would only give me a week.'

'Why a week?'

'Well, Geraldine, all I can say is, that just at the moment I am so much occupied with other things that—that—well, in a week I shall be more free—you will see then yourself. Your old friend will come back to you, perhaps, as careless and lazy as ever.'

'I want my old friend to stay as he is—thoughtful,

studious, and industrious. My old friend as he was,—Kit frivolous, lazy, and dreamy—I want to see no more. But there is no reason why my old friend's heart should be changed.'

Kit made no reply. Affairs of the heart are always delicate things to speak about.

'Well, what shall we do then?'

'Make her give me a week, that is all I ask. Five days will be even enough.'

'Why? This is nonsense, Kit, stark staring nonsense. Why a week any more than a day? If you love poor Rosie still, you can tell her so to-day—or to-morrow, if you like—just as well as next week.'

'It does seem so, doesn't it? Yet—never mind Rosie; tell me about yourself, Geraldine. Are you happy here?'

His voice perceptibly softened, and his eyes betrayed an interest in this young lady which he had not shown at the mention of poor Rosie.

'Oh! yes. Denny is most kind and generous. I have never before had such a holiday—you know that very well, Kit.'

'Of course. How could you? How could you?'

It is to be remarked that though he knew no more and no less concerning the affairs of Geraldine than he knew of Rosie, the former did not find out his ignorance.

They talked together for two hours, in which the girl was drawn on to speak of her aspirations and ambitions, and the young man sympathized.

'We may not meet this evening,' said Kit, when she would stay no longer. 'I was allowed two days. It will be best for me to spend this interval out of her sight.'

'But—consider, Kit,—don't you want to see her, and to be with her all the time?'

'No, I do not. If she would only give me a week.'

'Oh! you are mysterious again. I shall go. Kit'—she laid her hand upon his arm—'don't overdo ambition. Leave some room for love. You should put away your papers and come out, and put on a cheerful front as if you knew it would all come right.'

'Oh! I know it will all come right. Of that I have no doubt whatever,' he replied carelessly; 'but it will take certainly six days, and if she would only——'

Geraldine shook her head, laughed, and ran away.

Kit took up his pen again and resumed his work.

But the face of the girl came between him and his hard facts and harder logic. How can one reason calmly and dispassionately with a girl's face between one's eyes and the paper?

'Good Lord!' he murmured. 'He has been in the company of that beautiful creature—that queenly woman—pretty well all her life, and he goes and picks up that little insignificant creature who—— Now—if——'

But here his thoughts became too tangled for continuous speech. At such moments the brain goes off into half-a-dozen lines of reflection, all working at the same time. They are difficult to follow and impossible to interpret, or translate into speech.

'If'—he thought: we are all of us perpetually thinking, devising, contriving, lamenting, with this little conjunction at the beginning. 'If she knew'—of course she did not know—'would her heart, like every other woman's, harden at the prospect of wealth so enormous? No—surely no.'

He had learned from his own experience that there are other women who do not continually desire a vast income and the gratification of boundless desires.

He tried his work again. A second time he threw down the pen. He got up, walked to the window and stepped out upon the terrace. Lying on the grass under the walnut-tree he descried the young poet, the boy Robbie Lythe. He was lying supine, his head upon his hands, apparently asleep. Beside him was a volume of Keats. So lay Keats himself upon the grassy slopes of Hampstead to gaze upon the other grassy slopes which rise to Highgate, the last oaks of the old Middlesex Forest lying between.

Kit watched the boy with interest. He knew the symptoms. Indeed, this Kit—not the other—knew a very remarkable quantity of things. He marked the boy's hair—fine, silky and abundant: the upper eyelashes long and curled, the lower lying on the cheek: the fine oval lines and the delicate hue of the cheek: the blue veins showing on the back of his hand and on his temples. While he watched, the boy half-awoke, rolled his head, and opened his eyes. They were liquid eyes, glistening and full. He closed them immediately, and seemed to fall asleep once more.

Then there came walking slowly along the terrace, his hat in his hand, his brown velvet jacket thrown open to the air, the veteran Art Critic, Mr. Pinder.

'Ah!' he said, 'I thought you were off with the waggon-load of women this morning. Pleased I was to get rid of their cackle for an hour or two. Watching that poor lad? Sad look out for him—very.'

'A case of Struma Beautiful,' said Kit scientifically.

'Struma what?'

'Struma Beautiful. I should say, already in a somewhat advanced stage. There is languor and lassitude of the limbs. I dare say he has had a cough for a long time,—he is short of breath.'

'Well, man, if you mean that Robbie Lythe will go off in a consumption, I suppose we've all known that for a long time.'

'In a little while he will lose his beauty,' Kit continued, as if he had been a physician: 'the oval face will lose its curves: his cheek-bones will show: his nose will grow sharp: his hands will waste: his mind will grow languid: he will go on getting worse, and suddenly he will die. I have read of such cases and have seen them in hospital. Each one is a warning and a lesson, if men were not too foolish to learn. All our diseases—all our sufferings come from ignorance and the blindness which never sees anything.'

Mr. Pinder stared. Kit the scientific—Kit the moralist—was beyond him.

'Kit, Kit,' he sighed, 'how changed! It fatigues the brain to think of you. And all in three short months: well, no one thought you had it in you.'

'You see I did have it in me,' Kit replied coldly. This old man irritated him.

'Don't overdo it, Kit. Not too much zeal. I dare say it makes you feel mighty virtuous and superior. The fellows at the club are left far behind. But don't overdo it; don't come the moral philosopher over us. Leave us unrebuked. Now, Kit, if you have anything left of the old Adam, let us get our pipes and a tankard of something cool—the beer in this house is perfectly lovely,—and find a shady corner and have a talk.'

'Thank you, I have work to do; and I never drink in the morning.'

'Well,' the old man sighed. 'Stop a moment, Kit. There's nobody to talk to in the house; don't go in. Look here, Kit, about that half-sovereign?'

'What half-sovereign?'

'That insignificant coin which you refused to lend me the other day.'

'What does it matter?'

'No, no—stop! The coin is nothing; it is the refusal that sticks. It wasn't like you, to refuse that little loan. You ought to have been gratified—honoured—by the request. In your old age, when I am dead and gone, you will have to confess that Pinder—Pinder, the Art Critic—Pinder once asked you to lend him half-a-sovereign, and you refused. This will gnaw like an adder's tooth. Besides, the thing showed a spirit of suspicion—a nasty, tradesman-like, arithmetical spirit.'

'Why so?'

'Who counts what he lends or what he borrows? We lend each other a sovereign here and half-a-sovereign there; who can keep account of such trifles? When all is told, nobody owes anybody anything; we are even. The slate is wiped clean, and we begin again. Only rich men keep accounts. That is why one should not desire riches. I say no more. But I confess, Kit, that I was sorry for you, very sorry. In one so young, too, and so hard-up.'

'I am not so young, my dear sir; and I am no longer hard-up.'

'You accompanied your refusal with maxims, too—maxims! Well, I can never again borrow of you'—he shook his head sorrowfully,—'never again. You are changed indeed, my poor young friend.'

Kit was touched by the sincerity of the good old man's lamentation.

'My dear sir,' he said kindly, 'we all change sometimes. Wait a week or so, and perhaps you will find me changed back again.'

'Let us hope so. You are missed at the club, too. Other fellows can sing and play, but nobody so well as Kit—the old Kit. Denny Stirling sings your songs now, but not so well, Kit—not so well. Other fellows can tell stories, but none like Kit—the old Kit. Denny Stirling tries. He tells stories, your stories, too; but not so well, Kit—not so well.

Let us hope, indeed, that you will come back to us. What profits it, my dear young friend, for a man to get articles into the *Contemporary*, if he also becomes a solemn prig?

He was an old man, otherwise these words would have been resented.

'Well—well,' he went on, 'Dixi. I have liberated my soul. Enough about you. Now about other matters. Tell me—between friends, you know—something about this young Croesus.'

'What about him? He is an old friend of mine.'

'So am I. But this young fellow I have only known since I came here. He finds champagne every evening—the very best of champagne,—and Scotch after it—and really the very softest old Scotch I ever drank. Now, you know, hospitality like this is really a direct invitation to borrow. Therefore, advise me, Kit. Twenty pounds? Too much, you say? You really think twenty pounds too much? He's rolling in gold, you know.'

'I say nothing,' Kit replied with severity. 'I am not prepared to advise you at all in such a matter. Since you came here as a guest, I must say, however, that it would be more dignified to borrow nothing.'

'Kit Cotterel,'—the old Bohemian drew himself up with offended pride—'at my age, and with my experience, I may be allowed to know what is due to dignity. Understand, sir, that a gentleman may always borrow without the sacrifice of personal dignity; I have myself borrowed for forty years. He cannot, it is true, accept gifts; he may not take money. But he may borrow—he may borrow—without loss of self-respect. Remember that, sir.'

He clapped on his hat, and walked away with much dignity, murmuring phrases that began with the letter *d* and ended with the syllable *prig*.

Kit heard the words with superior pity, unmixed with scorn or wrath. He looked at his watch. It wanted half-an-hour of luncheon; then he would meet Geraldine again. But Mr. Pinder would be there too; therefore, there should be no more confidences.

Then the boy lying on the grass raised his head and called him:

'Kit—Kit Cotterel, I saw you last night; but I couldn't get in a word. And you looked so worried that I didn't try

twice. What has worried you, Kit? To-day you look so serious, so nervous. Is that because you have become a great writer all at once? Won't you write any more verses? Come over here and talk to me. Don't ask me to get up and leave this shady corner; the grass is soft and the light is soft,' the boy murmured, as if the mere physical enjoyment was almost more than he could bear. 'Come over and sit beside me, Kit; this place is heaven! I am full of lovely thoughts all day long, if I could only write them down. Oh! what poetry there will be when we reach to fulness of strength and perfect language! But it will not be all at once; we shall be always learning. Just now, only to lie on my back, with the dancing flicker of green shade and of sunshine playing through the leaves, and to hear the drone of the bees, and to feel the breeze, is happiness; and to have you with me as well, Kit, it is too much.'

'Are you better?' asked Kit, wondering who the boy really was.

'Oh! I am ever so much better than when you saw me last, three months ago. I had a bad time, rather, in July; I think I should have died for yearning after the green fields and the woods, if this invitation hadn't come. It was through you that it did come. I have never thanked you for it. Well, Kit, I shan't now, because it was nothing but your way—always trying to do something pleasant for somebody. I've had the most wonderful holiday here,' he sighed heavily; 'it is nearly over, but it will be a memory when I go back.'

Looking at this lad, Kit remembered certain words of his own about the wonderful power of suffering as an example and a stimulus, and he thought that he should somehow like this boy not to become an example and a lesson to humanity. A thought unworthy of a philosopher. But it crossed his mind.

'Have you talked with Geraldine since you came?' asked the boy.

'Yes, we had a little talk last night, and we have had a good talk this morning.'

'We have been talking a good deal about you, especially since the splendid news came. We don't agree; I want you to go on writing verses, but she wants you to develop

the more serious side. Don't quite give up verses. Oh! to write such verses as Keats wrote—where every line rings and rings in your brain! Kit, think of that; you might produce something as good. Don't quite give up verses.'

'I cannot say—just yet—what—I shall do.'

'Geraldine is ever so much better and stronger than she was before she came. She is perfectly splendid now. I say, Kit,'—he looked round to see if anyone was looking—'do you think I shall offend you if I ask you a question

'Ask as many as you please.

'You are such a good old friend to me, and so is Geraldine. It is a very impudent question, but it is in my mind always whenever I see Geraldine and you together.'

'Ask the question, you will not offend me.'

'Don't you think Geraldine a splendid girl—one of a million—the best girl that ever was?'

'Certainly,' Kit replied, with assurance. 'I am sure she is all that she looks.'

'There is nobody like her, is there? Nobody so unsel fish? Look in her face; it is the face of Beatrice. Only to look at her face lifts up the heart,' his limpid eyes grew dim with the ready tears. 'I say, Kit, in her presence it is impossible to be mean and low—all base thoughts fly shrieking at her approach. As for me, I worship her; I fall at her feet.'

Kit sat down on the grass beside the boy, whose enthusiasm interested him. Besides, he felt a desire to talk and to hear more about Geraldine.

'You worship her? I do not wonder at it.'

'I am unworthy to speak to her, but she suffers me. Kit, you know how kind you have been to me, how should I have got along at all without you? It always seems to me that it is Geraldine who has helped me, and not you. I put you two together always—and when you have helped me out of your poverty, I always think it is Geraldine who has done it with you. She knows I love her, and I think she knows that she is my goddess—my spiritual, not my earthly mistress! But you—Kit, you!'

'What of me?'

'You have known her all her life. You used to play with her, and you used to tell her all your ambitions. She has never ceased to watch you and to pray for you. And

now you have come out so splendidly she is so proud and happy; I cannot tell you how proud and happy she is——'

'Well, and what of me?'

He understood now the question in the boy's mind, but he wanted to hear it put plainly.

'What I wonder is—every day—why you, who know her so well, do not worship her also.'

Kit made no reply. He got up and walked about the lawn; then he came back again.

'“Out of her poverty,” you said. Is Geraldine still so poor?'

'What a question for you to ask! Can she ever be anything else? Just before we came here she was very poor indeed, because there was poor dear Sophia Gentry, you know—none of her pictures have sold this year, and what she will do when we go back we do not know. We are all so poor—so poor.'

'All so poor,' Kit repeated.

'But we stand by each other. Kit, it makes me wonder to see them all here. They go on as if they were born to it: they dance, and sing, and play as if they had been doing nothing else all their days. Well, Denny is the kindest and most generous man in the world—almost as generous as you, Kit.'

'And when it is over, you will all go back more discontented than ever.'

'No, no—filled with lovely memories. Discontented, after such a holiday as this? Kit, you are unreasonable.'

Kit nodded gravely and went back to the library.

CHAPTER X.

AFTER LUNCHEON.

At the mid-day refection Geraldine did not appear. Mr. Pinder, still disposed to growl like the skies after a thunder-storm, Kit, and Robbie Lythe represented the whole party. The boy quickly finished his luncheon and left the other two, retaking himself to the drawing-room, which he could have to himself the whole afternoon, unless Geraldine should happen to come and sit beside him. Here he would lie at

full length on cushions in one of the deep windows, and watch the sunshine on the leaves without, or the light playing on the painted coats-of-arms and the panels and dark furniture of the long low room. This was his intention, with the further thought of enjoying every moment of the time, so that nothing should be lost or forgotten when in the dark winter to follow he should remember this holiday for his solace.

Alas! he presently fell asleep, and so lost the whole afternoon; though in his dreams he was carried to the Heaven in which only young poets are allowed, there to be filled with thoughts ineffable, which even the greatest of poets cannot interpret into speech of man.

When Mr. Pinder, who still preserved the respectable wreck of a once colossal appetite, had done justice to the lunch, he clutched a decanter—a movement familiar to all who have watched the veteran toper—and poured out three glasses in succession, which he drank, not hurriedly, yet with eagerness.

‘Ha!’ he said, pausing after the third, ‘this is the wine, Kit, which we can’t get at the club. Madeira of some kind is on the list, I dare say, though I have never heard of any-one calling for it. To drink Madeira is a profession of wealth. To place Madeira on your table is a proof of wealth. It is the wine of the rich: it looks rich: it tastes rich: there’s a rich man’s self-complacency about it: there’s an oily, unctuous self-satisfaction which belongs to the rich man: it demands the finest glasses and the noblest decanters. It ought to be on the table of every man who has made his money.’

‘Denny Stirling hasn’t made his money.’

‘No; but his uncle did—Sam Stirling—who wasn’t so old as I am by half-a-dozen years. The cursing it was, I believe, that killed him.’

‘What cursing?’

‘Now I come to think about it, the very last person I should have expected to meet under this roof is that boy who had lunch with us—Robbie Lythe—the very last person. If it’s accidental, it’s a very curious and interesting accident. The very last person. I wonder he doesn’t pull down the pillars of the house! I wonder he doesn’t snatch the carving-knife and prod his host in a vital part!’

'Why the last person? Why shouldn't Robbie Lythe be here?'

'Don't you know? Your father knew, and Geraldine's father—everybody who knew Tom Lythe knew the story. I should have thought you had heard it long ago. But all his friends are dead, and I suppose the thing has been pretty well forgotten. Sophia Gentry knows it. Dear me! when I die, Kit, what an immense quantity of miscellaneous scandal will be forgotten! It doesn't get into the memoirs. If I could only write the things I have heard! Nobody's real life has ever been written—not even Rousseau's or Saint Augustine's. Now, there's the story of Sam Stirling, the millionaire. What a tearing and a rending of reputations there would be if I could write all that I have heard and seen!'

He took another glass of Madeira, shaking his head sadly.

'As for Robbie Lythe,' said Kit, fencing, 'one can see that he is consumptive. What else should I know about him?'

'Try this Madeira. No? You have turned over a new leaf, Kit, and it's a reproach to your elders. You are become Kit the sober, Kit the moral maxim-maker, Kit the corrector of morals, Kit the censor, for which you deserve to be expelled from the club. You are also Kit the industrious. You think you are going to lay the foundation of a cellar of Madeira all your own, I suppose. Well, you will never get that cellar; don't think it. They won't allow you to get rich—the people who pay the writing-man. When you are as old as I am you will very likely be as poor, with the bitter reflection of feeling that all your work has gone to make others rich. Now, I haven't done that. If I am not rich myself, no one can say I have made him rich. No, sir; that thought brings comfort. There is no successful book of mine which has made a publisher rich. Well—he pushed back his chair and got up—'you can go and slave for some editor or bookseller; I shall go and have a quiet pipe in the smoking-room, and a nap.'

'But about Robbie Lythe. Sit down again, man, and tell me all about it.'

Mr. Pinder took up the decanter. There were still two or three glasses in it. He sat down again, his fingers curled lovingly round its neck.

'Well, I knew his father, Tom Lythe. Very old friend of mine, Tom was.'

'What had his father to do with this roof?'

'I knew Tom early in life, when he was bright and clever; and I knew him late in life, when he was soured with disappointments. At one time—a few years before his death—I thought he had got over the trouble. Certainly, he seemed settled down to steady and generally cheerful drinking. But in his last illness it all came back to him. I was with him when he died, and he died very wretchedly. Lamented his wasted life, and compared his career with that of his old pal, Sam Stirling; and he cursed him for the cause of everything—cursed him solemnly, cursed him with his dying breath, cursed him and everything belonging to him.'

'Why?'

'And, after twenty years, here is his son a guest and friend of Sam Stirling's nephew and heir!'

'What does it mean? Why should the man curse my—Mr. Stirling?'

'They are both dead now, he who cursed and he who was cursed. Nobody could stand up against curses so tremendous. Sam Stirling died a year or two afterwards. I suppose no one told him about the curse, and yet—Well, the world goes round, and here is the boy in this very house.'

'You have not told me why this cursing was necessary?'

'Tom Lythe cursed his old pal because, you see, Sam Stirling stole his invention.'

'What invention?'

'Don't you know how that enormous fortune was made?'

'Yes—yes, I know.'

'Well, Tom invented the thing, not Sam Stirling at all. Bless you! Sam never invented anything; he was too stupid. He made Tom work, and stole what he made.'

'Stole is a strong word, Mr. Pinder.'

'So it is, Mr. Cotterel. You needn't look so savage. Sam wasn't your uncle, and you are not any the richer for his rogueries, are you? Stole, I said. Sam stole the invention, and grew richer every day; while Tom, from whose hands it had come, grew poorer and poorer.'

'Oh! Is this true, I wonder?'

'Fact, I assure you; quite true. Tom told everybody. There wasn't a bar in Fleet Street or the Strand twenty years ago where Tom's story wasn't known. To be sure, the men he told it to were all soakers like himself; and after twenty years there are not many left of any set of soakers. They are all dead except me.' Mr. Pinder's Madeira had the effect of making him repeat his words. The wine of the rich will do this. 'Bless you! I don't suppose that Denny Stirling has ever heard of the story, or Robbie Lythe either.'

'I assure you Denny hasn't.' Kit sat up eagerly. 'I am certain that he hasn't the least suspicion—how should he have?'

'Tom told it to me a hundred times; he even wrote it down for me. He wanted me to make a play of it—and I did think, once, that it might dramatize. That was a good time ago—five-and-twenty years ago—when I still thought of making plays. Yes, there is a situation in it. Pity I didn't work it up when I was still youngish and strong. Dear me! what a man I was at five-and-forty!'

'What was the situation?'

'Old Sam Stirling made his money by——'

'Yes, yes; we all know that. Get on.'

'Tom Lythe and Sam Stirling were apprenticed to the same shop—mechanical engineers they were—and they were afterwards employed in the same works. Pals, they were. One day Tom, who was an original kind of a chap, made a discovery. He's told me often what it was: but I never understood wheels and cogs and things. Everyone to his trade. Tom was a clever chap, but he was a fool. There are two kinds of clever chaps, Kit.' The old man leaned back in his chair, and rolled the glass about in his fingers; he also stretched out his legs and wagged his head, showing that he was physically comfortable, and that he was in no hurry to terminate this conversation. 'Two kinds—two kinds—Kit, my moral and superior young friend. There's the kind which invents, creates, and discovers—and is subsequently robbed, plundered, and turned stark-naked into the street. I am one of that kind—every man who writes belongs to that tribe. So are you; so are all the fellows at the club. That's the reason why there's no Madeira like this to be found there. The second kind contains those

who see their way how to make the first kind produce all the work for them to rob. That is the set to join. If you are wise you will pass over to that camp where they have Madeira every day—stuff like this. See how it clings to the glass! Just so doth Dives cling to his fine gold and his precious stuffs. Molten gold this is—nothing less than molten gold.'

'Can't we get back to the story?'

'There is not much story; it's done every day, wherever men work. You see, Kit, men are so wonderfully and fearfully made that they work, they throw their best work, they bring all their powers, their inventions, and their contrivances, and lay them at the feet of their employer, though they know him to be a greedy grinder and a sweater. Yes, and they will sell the finest invention, just as they will sell the most wonderful book or the most splendid picture—whether on a canvas or in print—for next to nothing to the first crafty man who comes to buy it.'

'We are coming, I suppose, to an end before long?' said Kit impatiently.

'We have come to the end of the story, and to the last glass in the bottle'—Mr. Pinder poured it out as he spoke. 'I am sorry, Kit, that you would have none, because it really was a most beautiful bottle of Madeira. There is no more story, in fact. Tom Lythe made his discovery; his friend Sam Stirling got possession of it. How he got it matters nothing—'

'You said he stole it.'

'Well, Sam became a millionaire out of Tom's invention, and Tom remained in his poverty. When one man gets rich out of another man's brains while the inventor remains poor, the first man is a thief and a robber, Kit. Is that good political economy?' He pronounced the last word with some difficulty, but his meaning was clear.

'No; that is very bad political economy, because whatever a man can buy becomes his own, whatever the price he has paid for it. Did my—did Mr. Stirling purchase Tom's invention, or did he steal it?'

'The situation of it in the play which I never wrote was something like this: Sam has found out—never mind how—that his friend has hit upon an invention; Tom has told him in general terms, if you like. Then Sam sets his wits

to work to find out what it is, and he can't. He watches his friend in the engine-rooms: he hangs about his desk: he searches his drawers, but he can't find anything; because, you see, Tom has his notes in his pockets all the time. At last Sam makes him drunk, and whilst he is drunk he steals the notes, copies them, replaces them in the drunken man's pocket, and next day goes and registers the invention.'

'Did that really happen?'

'Perhaps; I cannot say. The situation wasn't a bad one, and I don't remember ever seeing it on any stage. Perhaps he made Tom drunk, and then persuaded him to sell his right. There was drink in it, I know.'

'One would like to know exactly how it was done, or if it was done at all.'

'It was done, somehow: Sam got rich—Tom grew poor: Sam remained a rogue and a thief—Tom became a poor drunkard. When all secrets are revealed, Kit, my boy, I would rather be Tom than that other fellow.'

'Are you really sure—certain—that some such thing happened?'

'I am perfectly certain—as certain as I am that this bottle is empty—that Sam Stirling never invented anything. He was a lumpish kind of man, with small eyes close together, indolent in body and sluggish of brain. He invent? No, sir; but he could deceive and steal. Many a man has got the low cunning which enables him to prey on men's brains.'

Kit, flushed and agitated, sprang to his feet.

'I am very sorry you have told me this story—and yet I ought to know it. I cannot tell you how sorry I am to learn that shameful business—'

'Why, what does it matter to you?'

'Perhaps we can hunt up the thing, and prove the exact truth. Perhaps we may make up to the boy for this treachery, if it was treachery—'

'Well, Kit, you may be devilish clever; you may write very fine articles: but you can't very well make up for the loss of a million or three millions—they say it is three millions.'

'No—no, of course not; and yet—'

'Sam Stirling wasn't your uncle. Better let sleeping

dogs lie. The boy knows nothing about it, and Denny Stirling knows nothing. Best say no more about it.'

'It is disgraceful—it is shameful. It is enough to poison the life of the man who has got that fortune, only to feel——'

'My dear Kit, these are heroics. The thing is done—Tom is dead; and he cursed the robber, and the robber is dead.'

'But the boy survives.'

'Very true; and, considering all the circumstances, I say again, that it is curious, to say the least of it, to see Tom's son enjoying the hospitality of Sam's heir, and both in ignorance of these little facts. And now, my dear boy,'—he rose slowly and deliberately,—'Madeira, if you drink a whole bottle, is apt to get into the head a bit. I shall go to the smoking-room, and sleep it off.'

CHAPTER XI.

THE PICNIC.

IN this favoured land there is everywhere within easy reach a ruined castle or a ruined abbey or a British hill-fort or a Roman camp. They have been left untouched by successive generations, in order that young people may have a place for picnics. So that the works of the great destroyers—King Harry the Eighth, who ruined the abbeys, and King Cromwell who slighted the castles—remain to keep their memory green, as much as the massive piles of the dread Sovereign, Great Cheops himself. When the young man sits among these ruins, a dainty damsel at his side, his seat a mound which covers broken tracery, shattered mullions, and precious carved work; when he gazes down the long roofless nave, upon the wreck of the once noble west front, and murmurs a tender whisper in the ear of his companion: when to these joys he adds the wing of a chicken and a goodly slice of toothsome ham, with salad from the salad-bowl and a bumper of champagne; and when he thinks of the pale-faced nuns who wandered once about the broken cloisters, that young man is moved to

gratitude for the benevolent monarch who made this place a ruin—for him.

To such an abbey, still splendid with tall columns and windows of delicate tracery and lofty arches, came this company in brakes and waggonettes. They rambled among the grass-grown nooks: they stood within the walls of the old refectory, and marked the place where the pulpit stood, in which the novice read 'The Acts of the Saints'—the only work of fiction allowed to the unhappy monks: they laughed and chattered within the chapel, which once echoed before break of day with their chanting: they peered into the monks' kitchen, and wondered what culinary marvels were tossed up for the Abbot, and how the monastic soup was brewed: they stood beside the old fish-ponds, and asked how the carp and perch were dressed so that even days of fasting might not altogether lack some carnal joy: they walked about the broken cloisters which surround the monks' burial-place—their bones lie long forgotten, even the bones of the wisest Abbot and the gravest scholar and the most beautiful illuminator and the most wonderful writer of manuscript, all forgotten and their works destroyed. Their laughter echoed about the walls, because, though they said, 'This is the Refectory, this the Abbot's room and this the kitchen'—their thoughts were not at all among the dead monks. Why should they be? The present belongs to the young. Theirs is the sunshine: theirs all the fruits. Dry-as-dust and his friends are well stricken in years, poor things. They may restore the old abbey, and revive the old life—for their own amusement—the young have nothing to do with the dead past, save to enjoy whatever heritage it has conferred upon them.

In the very centre of this roofless church, Rosie sat upon a fallen stone, Denny beside her. The merriment had gone out of her face: she laughed no longer: the tears stood in her eyes: while Denny, like a loyal friend, was pleading, with all the eloquence at his command, the cause of his friend. It was just at the very moment, by a curious coincidence—only nobody knew it—that Robbie Lythe was putting that question of his concerning Geraldine.

'It is no use,' said Rosie, 'no use at all trying to shield him. He has been carrying on a treacherous game. Every other day he has written me a letter—a letter such as one

has a reason to expect if one is engaged——' She blushed a little. 'If you were engaged you would know exactly the kind of letter.'

'I hope I should under such happy circumstances behave, in all respects, as an engaged man ought. If I were engaged to—to one girl of all the girls in the world, I know that I should exhaust the adjectives of the language and fill the letters with one verb only—past, present, and future.'

'And all the time,' Rosie continued, 'he has been actually forgetting my very face. The only explanation he has offered is, in fact, an outrage in itself—an insult that I can never forgive—it is, that he had really, for the moment, forgotten me! There is an explanation from a man who pretends to be in love!'

'It is awkward, certainly,' said Denny, rubbing his chin. 'It is extremely awkward. In fact, I never heard of a position more awkward.'

'You can call it awkward if you please—I call it heartless.'

'It seems heartless. But suppose'—he rubbed his chin harder—'suppose—you know—a possible explanation. Kit is a very good actor—isn't he?'

'I don't know. Kit may be a buffoon when he permits himself to lose his self-respect; but one can hardly call him an actor.'

'Yet he is—Kit is a very fine actor and full of fun. Quite full of fun. Capable of any kind of mad waggy— which suggests a very simple explanation. He has come down, I will suppose, resolved to play a little comedy. The first thing he does—the opening scene in the farce, is when the lover pretends to forget the girl he is engaged to——'

'Oh! You think that, do you?'

'I suggest it. The girl, of course, is highly indignant—and threatens to break it off. He pretends to be repentant; but still keeps up the pretence of coldness.'

'Go on, pray.'

'She gives him two days, in which to recover his old style—his tenderness, you know—the longing in his eyes and the softening of his voice—two days. He asks for a week. She refuses.'

'This is, indeed, a beautiful comedy.'

'Isn't it? Quite admirable. She refuses to give him

more than two days. On the second day he keeps it up still. He pretends love; but when she looks for the old manner, it is gone—love is there no longer. Then she breaks it off altogether.'

'Dear me! What a very funny piece it is! How exquisitely ludicrous!'

'Yes. But wait. That brings you to the end of the second act. The third act is a week later—while the girl is sitting, bitter against her faithless lover, perhaps sad—'

'Oh! "perhaps sad." This is where the laughter comes in, I suppose.'

'Yes. He comes back, you know, dancing and laughing, all the old love returned—the old ardour and the old passion—and she forgives and—'

'No'—Rosie started to her feet—'she does not. She will never forgive him,—never—never—never! You call this a comedy—you? I thought better of you. I thought you were more human.'

'I fear,' said Denny, 'that, after all, I have only made things worse. My comedy was ill-conceived and impossible. I give up the comedy. Let us try something else.'

'You need try nothing more.'

'Kit has been very hard at work, thinking like an owl, and as solitary, for three months: he has given up his club and all his pleasant vices: he has been industrious for a long spell: he has changed his style, confound him: paid his debts, and opened a banker's account—he actually has money in the bank. Now, if you know Kit—and you do,—you must know that after such a spell of work he will very soon want a holiday. And so, you see, the new Adam will be put off and the old Adam will return.'

But the girl shook her head sadly.

'He will come back,' Denny repeated. 'In a week or so you will be wondering that you have missed him. He will come back, and be as lazy and as helpless as ever, if you wish: or he shall be as industrious and as successful as you desire.'

Rosie shook her head.

'One does not love a man,' she said wisely, 'because he is lazy and helpless. Do not think that. At present it seems as if he was gone out of my heart altogether, never

to come back. But if he were to come, and with the old light in——’

She looked up and stopped short, because it was there—the old light that she remembered—a light never to be mistaken or forgotten: a light that never means anything but love: the light that formerly lit up the spectacled eyes of her lazy lover. She dropped her eyes and trembled, blushing.

‘You shall see the old light,’ he murmured softly. ‘Do you believe that Kit has really forgotten you? Do you think—oh! do you think—that anybody could ever forget you, Rosie?’

She got up quickly, with averted face.

‘We will find the others,’ she said; ‘I think my affairs have been discussed quite enough.’

She led the way out of the church to the ruins, where one or two of the company were exhibiting such rags and shreds of archæological lore as are always trotted out on such occasions: and the rest were listening with the intelligence and interest which may be perceived on the faces of the ladies at a scientific evening in the theatre of the Royal Institution, or, indeed, upon any personally conducted tour of improvement.

They spread the tablecloth on the grass of the Monks’ Refectory, and sat round, some on rugs and some on fallen stones, and some on mounds of turf. Here was a change from the droning voice of the sleepy novice. But the walls were used to these things: they were scandalized no longer by the laughter of girls and the music of their voices. Presently, someone—it was the young assistant-master—produced a banjo, and began to strike upon that musical instrument, and to sing a song, and everybody laughed. Even the teacher in the High School laughed, though the thing was so very unworthy of the profession. Youth, you see, will feast and laugh and be happy whenever it can: and if a row of grinning skulls of the old monks had been strung around the walls, with a legend reminding them that to this complexion must they come at last, they would have feasted and laughed in exactly the same way.

But Rosie sat quiet beside Sophia Gentry and suffered the others to talk and laugh. Afterwards, it was remembered by those who are prophets after the event—a very

numerous and wide-spread profession—that Denny also had intervals of silence, and that he kept glancing furtively at Rosie, as if apprehensive or doubtful. Subsequent events seemed to explain their conduct. They did not really explain anything; but the after-event prophet thought so, which did just as well.

When the sun was getting low they drove home, for the most part in silence. The end of such a day is always rather sad. Witness the vans when they come home from Epping Forest. The soft influences of nature and the close of a festive day incline the heart to melancholy—so that many go home in tears.

Geraldine stood on the terrace to welcome them, when they reached home—with her, Robbie Lythe. Mr. Pinder still slept in the smoking-room—and Kit did not show up that evening at all—nor do I know what became of him.

CHAPTER XII.

THE JUDGMENT OF THE SECOND DAY.

THE morning brought the second day, when the lover was to show himself in his ancient manner—to display the gallantry and ardour proper to love—or else——

Rosie waited for him in the library. He ought to have been there first.

It is a bad beginning—a most unfortunate omen—when a girl is kept waiting. What is to be thought of a lover who keeps an appointment a quarter of an hour after the time? Where is eagerness? Where is ardour? Where is the burning desire to be with the object of his worship? Alas! where?

To few women is it given to understand the eagerness and intensity of a man's passion. But any tendency to the other extreme every woman is quick to understand.

Rosie, therefore, waiting for her former lover, was in no mood for trifling.

'So, sir,' she began, when he tardily appeared.

He did not at sight of her quicken his step, nor did he run to protest penitence. Not at all. He walked quietly to the

window where she stood, bearing in his hands a roll of manuscript. Because, you see, he proposed, when this little interview should be completed, to go on with his work; and he was perfectly calm and collected, and only wished that it was over and done with.

Therefore, though Rosie began with her 'So, sir,' she stopped short when she observed the deliberation of his step, and understood by the exhibition of the MS. that his work was in his mind as well as his love.

'So, sir,' she repeated, with increased warmth, when he stood before her, 'you have kept me waiting a quarter of an hour. What have you got to say, now that you are here?'

'I am anxious to explain——'

'I want no explanations!' She stamped her foot angrily. 'I will have none. If that is all you have to say, you had better go at once.'

All she wanted, this poor girl, was to see once more her old sweetheart as he had always been, full of love and of tenderness, love shining in his eyes, love hanging on his lips. And this man could give her nothing but explanations—

'I am anxious to say, Rosie,'—he still pronounced the name with an effort,—'most anxious to assure you that this little misunderstanding of ours can be easily removed by a little patience, a little forbearance for three or four days only. Let me go away now, and come back to you, say, in three or four days.'

She laughed scornfully.

'I ask for bread and you give me a stone,' she said. 'No, sir, I will not wait!—I will exercise no more patience.'

'Then, all I say is, if you will not accord me that delay—is that——'

'Well?'

'All I can say is that'—pity the sorrows of this poor young man, about to pronounce a perjury of the most flagrant kind—'that the fondest affection—the most sincere affection,—the—the—tenderest love——'

'Oh, good gracious! Why, you can't even act the part the least bit! Stop this nonsense, sir—I will not be insulted by it.'

'Then what in the name of goodness can I say?'

'Anything but that. I expected as much, however. I understood at once—oh! at once—when I ran in to meet you two days ago, that it was all over between us. Why, now, turn your eyes upon me, meet my eyes full. Let me look—so.'

He obeyed with evident reluctance, and turned his spectacles to meet her eyes. Alas! these same spectacles, now so cold, had been nearly melted in the past by the burning ardour of his gaze. And now——

'So,' she repeated, 'nothing more need be said. Your eyes are quite enough. To be sure, your voice and your manner are also enough. But your eyes have settled it.'

'I am, I assure you, most unfeignedly sorry. This is a—a most unfortunate occurrence. If there is anything I can do or say——'

'There is, I assure you, nothing. Well, it is all over. You are free, and so am I. The Kit I used to know is dead and buried.'

'No, no; he is alive!'

'Dead and buried he is, and forgotten—or nearly. Who are you, sir? How do you come to call yourself Mr. Arthur Christopher Cotterel? You are a stranger to me. Yet it is only three or four days that you told me in a letter'—she took it out of her pocket—'you told me—oh! how can I say the words! What does it matter what you told me?'

She tore the letter into fragments and threw them on the ground. One of the fragments, however, flew into his face, lighting on his mouth.

It was as if he had been struck by the girl's hand.

Then she produced a small packet of silver paper, and opened it with trembling fingers.

'He wasn't rich, my old Kit,' she said, her voice trembling, and her lips, as well as her fingers. 'He wasn't rich at all, and it is but a little bundle of presents that he could make me. He used to idle away his time, talking nonsense to me, the silly fellow, instead of working for money.'

She glanced up quickly, but there was not the least response in her lover's eyes. He looked puzzled, and even bored. His eyes were stony.

She brushed away a tear, and hardened her heart.

'Well, he is gone. Here is a ring he gave me. Of course, I took it off the day before yesterday, when I saw from your

face that it was all over. A pretty little ring, isn't it? I wonder if you remember what you said—he said—when you—he, I mean, put it on my finger?’

‘At this moment,’ Kit replied, in some confusion, ‘the words have escaped—’

‘Oh!’ She snapped the ring in two—it was but a thin little thing—and threw the fragments out of the window. ‘Why ask such a man anything? Here is the brooch. Kit said it was his mother’s. It isn’t pretty; but I valued it because it was his mother’s. Take it back. Here is a Trichinopoly chain. Kit bought it, perhaps you may remember, of a sailor at the East India Docks. He gave the man every penny he had in the world for it, thinking to please me, and had to walk all the way home in the rain: that was the kind of thing the old Kit used to do. There are two or three other things, with a history belonging to every one; but you have forgotten them all,’ she added, still a little wistfully.

‘Perhaps not all.’

‘Tell me one. Tell me what happened when you gave me this pencil-case.’ She took it out of the parcel and looked at it. ‘I was so happy that day; I believed in my lover—nothing makes a girl so happy as to believe in her lover. Kit, if you will only say now again what you said then—in the same voice and with the same light in your eyes. No—no—it is useless! The man is insensible. He has neither memory, nor heart, nor any sympathy left. He is of marble.’

‘I am not, indeed; and yet—’

‘Take the things, Mr. Cotterel, and let me go at once. The sight of you makes me burn with rage. Let me go quickly—never dare to speak to me again.’

Said Kit—and this was really the most remarkable thing he did say during the whole of this unpleasant quarter of an hour:

‘I promised I would do the best I could, and a pretty mess I have made of it.’

‘Very pretty indeed.’

They looked at each other in silence for a long space: he with an exasperating bewilderment as if he knew not how things had come about, or what he ought to do; she scornfully.

'It is very curious,' she observed coldly, 'how a change in one's feelings about a man alters one's opinion of his character and his appearance. My eyes are opened. I cannot believe now that three days ago I actually thought Kit Cotterel rather a good-looking man. Oh! look in that glass behind you. Is that a figure of Apollo?'

Kit did not turn to survey himself. He only replied gravely:

'I do not want a figure of Apollo. I am quite contented to remain as I am.'

'Oh, but the poet of the club ought to look like a poet. And to think that until quite lately I thought him really a poet, with his smoking-room rhymes!'

'The poet of the club? Yes, I believe I was the poet of the club?'

'I once invested his habits with romance. It seemed fine for him to be too lazy to do any work—genius, I thought, has eccentricities. It was a mark of genius that he should smoke a pipe all day long with his hands in his pockets. It was characteristic of him to take a wife and condemn her to continual poverty and makeshift, owing to his laziness.'

The unhappy Kit opened his lips twice, but said nothing. No sound came forth at all.

'It is as if I have awakened out of a long and bad dream. Mr. Cotterel, I thank you from my heart. It is quite certain that you never did me a greater kindness—that you have never behaved with more unselfish generosity—than at this present moment. I wish you better success, sir, with your next wooing. But your pipe and your beer will make up for the loss of a mistress.'

Queen Zenobia herself—the stateliest of Queens—could not have walked down the room with more dignity, though Rosie, poor child, was no more than five foot nothing.

The rejected lover looked after her with a look of perplexity rather than dismay. When she slammed the door—every woman reserves the right of slamming the door in moments of indignation—he whistled. Whistling is not usually regarded as a sign of grief—we give to sorrow words, not whistling. Yet it exactly expressed his mind. What he said by means of this sound was, in effect: 'The other fellow will have all his work cut out to get that young woman back.'

The door opened, and Denny cautiously put in his head and looked round the room.

'I watched her from the porch,' he said, 'I saw her running upstairs. Well, old man, you soon got it over. Made it all right at last, I hope?'

'I did my best,' said Kit: 'I told you I would.'

'What did you make up?' Denny asked anxiously. 'We must both be in the same tale. What did you tell the dear girl? I couldn't see her face. Well, it's all right, isn't it?'

'On the contrary, it's all wrong.'

'All wrong?'

'Yes. All very wrong indeed. Just as wrong as it can be.'

'I thought you were going to pretend. You told me you had made up something.'

'My dear fellow—so I had. But things didn't go as I thought they would. First, you know, I intended to make my little speech about pre-occupation and an overwrought brain; and then she would have said something, and then I should have said something more, and we should—I suppose—have fallen'—he yawned a little—'fallen into each other's arms, or something equivalent.'

'Something equivalent,' Denny grunted. 'Go on.'

'Well, she never gave me a chance—wouldn't hear me. She was in a rage royal from the beginning. Now I hoped——'

'Oh! you hoped—never mind what you hoped. What did you say?'

'Nothing, I tell you—I said nothing—I told you so before. I couldn't get a word in edgeways. She never gave me a chance.'

'What did she say, then?'

'She asked me to look at her—that was enough.'

'I suppose it was. And your eyes had as much expression as a boiled oyster.'

'Your own, my friend. But it was quite enough. I've received a most emphatic dismissal, with plain speaking about my personal appearance and the habits of my life.'

'Then now you've made the job complete. Emphatic dismissal!'

'Accompanied, I repeat, by contemptuous reference to

my personal appearance and the habits of my life—as she knew them. A girl who meant going on again would hardly speak contemptuously of her lover's appearance, I take it.'

'What had she got to say about your looks, I should like to know? They used to be good enough for her.'

'She seemed inclined to ridicule the figure. Well, for my own part, I am perfectly satisfied with the figure. Compact, I call it,' he looked complacently at his effigy in the glass. 'Compact, healthy, well-nourished, useful, and—now that I've taken off some of the fat induced by immoderate drinking and laziness—active. No organic disease anywhere: no weak points that I have discovered: no hereditary tendencies: a frame eminently fitted and eminently designed for a life of hard and unremitting labour.'

'So you seem to think.'

'As for my habits of life—as she understands them, she is quite right. I don't call it good form myself, to spend the whole of the night and the best part of the day with a lot of fellows who do nothing but talk of the grand things they are going to do.'

'If I'd only known what a prig you would become——'

'Let me go on. She also very rightly insisted on the selfishness of marrying a girl when you knew beforehand——'

'I did not know beforehand.'

'Well, my friend, you have indeed got your work cut out. I don't envy you the job; and if words and looks mean anything at all, there is not a man in the whole world whom that young lady will not marry rather than you.'

'I say, what is to be done? Stop preaching, man, and let us consider. Stay, I have it—I have it. Let us change back again, at once. Let us lose no time. Good heavens! Every moment that we put off is a moment lost.'

'There is the promised article not quite finished,' said Kit, 'but I won't let that stand in your way. Let us change at once, by all means.'

'Where are the materials, then?' Denny was all impatience. 'Let us get back, and this evening I will astonish them by the reappearance of the real Kit—none other genuine. Quick, man, quick!'

'The phial is in my pocket. But first I have got to put you under mesmeric influence. Sit down. Look at me—keep your eyes on mine, and fix your thoughts on me. Now—now—now.'

He waved his hands and concentrated his gaze. Denny sat like a patient inhaling ether: passive, yet eager.

After ten minutes of violent exertion, Kit desisted.

'It is no use,' he said; 'something is in the way. What are you thinking of now?'

'I'm thinking of Rosie.'

'Pshaw! Think of me.'

Again they began. After ten minutes more Denny jumped out of his chair.

'This is fooling. Remember, it was Denny who mesmerised Kit. Let me try.'

He tried for a quarter of an hour. The result was the same.

'It is no use,' said Kit, 'we must give it up. I suppose the reason is that we agreed to remain as we are for three months. We *can't* change now, until the time's up. Only three days more—courage!'

'Only three days! Only three thousand centuries! And every moment that poor child growing to hate me more and more. Poor girl, what must her sufferings be! My mind is made up!' he cried desperately. 'I shall tell her exactly what has happened—that you are not yourself—and I—I—am the real Kit!'

He rushed from the room to carry out his desperate resolve. A second time Kit waited till the door was slammed, and then whistled softly. After this he sat down to his papers and continued his work.

CHAPTER XIII.

'UNDERSTAND ME CLEARLY.'

BEHIND the house there lies a wood, a deep thick wood, where in summer the boughs spread interlaced overhead so that the light is softened, and the sun breaks through in shifting gleams and glances like dropping rain. In the

autumn the paths are thick with yellow leaves, and at all times are strewn with twigs which crack under the feet as one walks. Hither came Rosie, the nymph bereaved of her lover. She came not to weep, because the time for tears was gone: after the first day there was no room for tears: she came to think. We always say we come to think when we mean that we come to let the mind wander uncontrolled. This is the time when a whole army of thoughts, fancies, memories, and purposes, seize upon the brain and demand space and an interval to occupy it, and do and say and act as they please. At such times one must be alone.

Rosie wandered here alone, such thoughts hurrying, driving, rushing in her brain. At times she came to the edge of the wood, close to the garden. Then she heard the voices of those who played or walked there, and she turned back and plunged again into the depths, just exactly as if she had been a nymph in Ovid's 'Metamorphoses.' But none of Ovid's maids ever received such provocation as this damsel. I know not how long she was alone. It may have been an hour: it may have been ten minutes: thought keeps no count of time. And here Denny presently found her.

'Rosie'—he spoke in a whisper, though there was nobody to hear him—'I am come to talk with you. Give me five minutes only.'

'If you come as a messenger from Mr. Cotterel——'

'I do, in a sense—and yet not what you mean.'

'Well, then, I am not going to listen to you. We agreed yesterday, I believe, that my dead-and-gone love affair had been discussed enough.'

'Yes, but what has happened to-day——'

'It was a natural consequence of what happened before. I don't want to hear anything. Denny—Mr. Stirling—you have been a very kind friend to me—to all of us—don't make me forget all the kindness. Let me go home without mixing you up in my little troubles. You would not, I am sure, desire to make them worse.'

'Make them worse? Good heavens! I would die rather——'

'Quite enough said. Will you leave me here, or shall I leave you?'

'One word first—I want to explain.'

‘Once more, I will not listen to any explanations.’

‘I must say it—you must hear me. Rosie, you don’t know—you don’t understand. It is difficult to explain these things. Kit is—I am—that is to say, the real Kit is not the present Kit.’

‘No—of that I am perfectly certain.’

‘Of course. He is changed—he agreed to change—now you understand what I mean.’

‘My Kit is dead and buried and forgotten. I did not need to be told that he is changed.’

Denny made a gesture of despair.

‘I cannot make her understand!’ he cried. ‘Once more, if you were to see and understand quite plainly that he had returned—quite himself, and in his right mind—could you again—’

‘Never again. Once for all: never again. And now, if you talk any more about him, I shall have to leave you and go back home. Don’t spoil my last days here, Denny,’ she said, in her soft sweet voice. ‘I have been so very, very happy here. Kit has done his best to spoil my happiness—just at the last—but—but—and if you will only say no more about him, I assure you I can forget him—’

But here she broke down.

‘I will do anything you like,’ he replied dismally. ‘You have only to command me. I will say no more, if you are really and truly lost—hopelessly lost—to Kit.’

‘You are indeed a true friend.’ The tears rose to her eyes, because he looked and spoke in such evident distress. ‘Why, you could not be more in earnest if you were pleading for yourself instead of your friend. Oh! if Kit had shown only half the feeling that you have displayed—but there, if he could have felt it, the occasion would never have arisen. Denny, your friend isn’t worth it. He doesn’t suffer: he doesn’t give the thing a thought. His heart is of stone. Why, I saw all the time he was only thinking what he could make up, and longing to get rid of me. I am sure that at this moment he is calmly sitting over his manuscript, his mind wholly wrapt in his work.’

‘Pleading for myself—I am—for Kit—for myself—in my *alter ego*.’

‘Your *alter ego*? That is what one friend calls another. Well, I shall hear no more pleading—I must hear you, since

you will still be talking about him.' She turned to go back to the house, but he looked so miserable that she hesitated. 'Denny,' she said earnestly, 'you have been so kind to all of us—you have made yourself so good a brother to us all—and you seem to take this wretched business of mine so much to heart, that I will try to make you understand how I feel about it.'

'Tell me what you can—what you please.'

'You talk like a man, you know. How could we ever go on—Kit and I—just as if nothing had happened? The thing is impossible. Between the past and the future there lie two days—the day before yesterday, and this morning. Can I ever, do you think, forget the moment when Kit, my lover—whose last love-letter was in my pocket—refused even to recognise me? Is that possible, do you think? Well, if it were possible—if I could acknowledge that his mind was wandering—though one hardly likes lovers whose minds go wandering—how could I get over this morning's interview? Love is dead. Kit was quite ready to protest all kinds of love—but he is a bad actor: for that matter, no actor ever yet put real love into his eyes—his face—his voice—his carriage. It can't be done. Now do you understand?'

'This is terrible.'

'Oh! he will get over it. And a strange thing has happened to me. If I confess it to you, it is because you are so much his friend that I want you to understand everything. It is, that I really feel relieved now that it is all over. At first I was very sorry. I cried a good deal, with Geraldine, over it, and of course I was horribly, frightfully insulted. Now I am glad to be free. It isn't only that the transformation has brought a new person altogether—a complete stranger—but I cannot understand how I could ever have thought myself in love even with the old Kit.'

'Oh!' Denny groaned. 'But you were in love with him?'

'I dare say I thought so. But I seem to have recovered my senses and my eyesight. As for finding my senses, I see that I am poor, and likely to remain poor unless, which isn't likely, I develop some unexpected talent: but if I were to marry this man, who would never do a man's share of work, I should become ten times as poor, and a hundred

times as miserable. I will bear the burdens that are laid upon me, but not those which are laid upon him as well. And as for recovering my eyesight, I now plainly see that the life he used to lead was selfish and frivolous. How does it help the household if the husband sits up all night talking with his friends? What honour, even apart from money, does a man get who writes little catchy rhymes and sets them to little catchy tunes? That is all that poor Kit ever did. He called himself a poet by profession, when he was but an amateur rhymist. Now, of course, he is a prig, and a complete stranger.'

'Oh! But he had higher ambitions.'

'It is no use to have higher ambitions if you do not exert yourself to achieve something of them. He was a beautiful dreamer. Oh! yes. I know that I used to listen to him with the greatest pleasure. He quite carried me away out of myself with his dreams. I knew all along that they were nonsense, but it made me happy to listen to him. And I knew all along that he would make my life miserable.'

'Yet there was nothing he would not have done to make you happy.'

'How can a married woman be happy when there is not money enough? He was ready to do everything for me except the one thing essential—to work for me.'

'But he has begun to work.'

'Very likely. I do not care any longer what he does. He has become, you see, commonplace to me. Nothing is left of him but his short fat figure and his spectacles and round face. He is quite commonplace, a person of ordinary abilities, who thinks he has genius; a man, as I now perceive plainly, of coarse tastes and low companions. In his new shape he is even worse. He used to be cheerful: now he laughs no longer. He used to laugh with everybody: now he is as solemn as an undertaker. He talks maxims: he writes philosophical papers: he is a lesser Oliver Goldsmith trying to look like John Stuart Mill.'

'Oh! Denny groaned. 'If you only knew——'

'I am no longer fond of Bohemia. And I never did care for prigs.'

'Rosie—for Heaven's sake—your words tear me to pieces. Believe me, I am, myself, the very man!'

'Are you?' she laughed, not understanding in the least

what he meant. 'Man and wife are no longer twain, but one. Yet you and Kit are not man and wife. That you are his very good and loyal friend you have proved in a way that does you honour. But even David and Jonathan did not call themselves each other, did they? Well, I will say no more, because I would not give you pain—who have given me so much pleasure. You shall not think me ungrateful. But you understand—you understand quite clearly, Denny?'

She looked up with soft pleading eyes, and her voice was so tenderly caressing that the young man's knees trembled.

'There is no room left for any mistake. Plead his cause no longer.'

'You do not understand,' Denny stammered.

'I don't want to understand. In a day or two I go home again. It is not pure, unalloyed happiness that awaits me on my return. But I shall be happier than I was, partly because I shall have my stay here to look back upon. It has been a very sweet and beautiful time.'

She spoke with an unaccustomed gravity. When she had finished she held out her hand. Denny stooped and kissed it without reply. Then they turned and parted, Rosie going back to the house, and Denny staying in the wood. He, like Rosie, wanted to think. His brain was filled with ten thousand devils fighting, struggling, and trampling on each other.

'I am a commonplace person,' he murmured. 'My associates and boon companions are a company who drink away their brains: we dream of things we shall never accomplish: my appearance is ridiculous: my future is certain: failure is written on my brow: selfishness is the key-note of my character. It is all over then. She could never forget these things—never, never! Not even if I were to write the whole of the thoughtful magazines for twelve months on end. Never! And I love her a thousand times as much as ever. What to do? What to say? Where to turn?'

For the first time in the memory of the oldest visitor, Denny did not appear at luncheon. His place was empty. But Kit was there, calm, philosophic, and not in the least disturbed by the events of the morning. He looked round the table with a front of brass, and caught the eye of the girl who had told him so many home-truths without showing the least sign of emotion. His eyes were stony; there was

neither love nor memory, not even common interest, in them. He did not care—he truly did not care that he had been dismissed. This knowledge naturally did not decrease the girl's bitterness.

The talk fell upon some topic of the day, one of those subjects on which ordinary people converse, with the ideas of the day before yesterday's leading article. But Kit—this long-hidden Kit—knew. He talked as if he had been on the spot and in the thick of things. He talked like one in the inner ring, and with such grasp of the subject, and a knowledge so real, that Geraldine glowed with pleasure only to see how her old friend was at last showing the stuff which she always knew was in him. But Rosie, who had no interest in the question, and cared no more about the speaker, listened unmoved and without admiration. Besides, her thoughts were in the wood, where she left the truest and most loyal of friends. What did it mean, this passionate pleading for a friend who, she now remembered, had never once spoken of him during all the time of her acquaintance with him? Why this wonderful fervour of friendship for one who certainly had got on very well without him? Besides—besides, what meant that look in the advocate's eyes? Can one plead another's cause so thoroughly as to reproduce the unmistakable look of love for vicarious and not for personal purposes? I do not say that the girl formulated the difficulty in these words, but the difficulty was there.

'My dear,' whispered Sophia the sympathetic, 'you look worried. What is it?'

'Not *that*,' she answered, with the precision of a thought-reader. 'I am free—and I am glad, not sorry. But, Sophia dear, I think that the sooner we are all home again and quietly at work, the better it will be for some of us.'

CHAPTER XIV.

'TELL ME ABOUT YOURSELVES.'

SOPHIA GENTRY sat under a tree in the churchyard finishing a water-colour sketch of the old tower. She was one of those who are always at work, even though her work no longer sold. This afternoon, she made, herself, a picture

far prettier than any she was likely to paint. She had thrown off her hat, and sat bareheaded. She might have represented the Muse of Painting grown old, her hair white, her fair face lined with crows-feet. Yet, because she represented the Muse and had spent all her life in meditation over her Art, she was still beautiful, serene, never weary of her work. Some artists manage to look the part so much better than they play it. Beside her, on a flat tombstone, sat Geraldine. They were talking, and the elder lady prattled on, as painters do at their work; unconnectedly, with pauses of silence, without much thought. They were talking about people, which is the favourite and sometimes the only subject of conversation with all of us, men or women.

'And so, my dear,' said Sophia, twisting her head about so as to get the full effect of her last touches, 'we had better, after all, leave the matter alone.'

'I shall speak to him—once—about it,' said Geraldine: 'Surely I know Kit well enough to speak. We ought to be quite satisfied that their decision is wise for both of them. It would be dreadful if they were making some terrible mistake which a word might set right.'

'I have seen, ever since he came down, that he no longer cares about her. My dear, I think that the boy has become so earnest in the pursuit of literature that he has no room for any other thoughts. I saw the first evening, at dinner, that he wasn't thinking about the poor girl at all. He was *distract*: he looked bored: when I have talked with him I have found a constraint. And you?'

'No—he is quite changed, that is true; but I find no constraint. He talks to me,—perhaps not so freely; but then not so boyishly. As for Rosie, she declares she is really glad to be free. I wonder if she deceives herself?'

'I believe not. Rosie was at first indignant, and no wonder. Now, she is indifferent.'

'How can any girl who has once loved Kit ever become indifferent to him? But of course I knew him so long ago. To me he is always interesting.'

Sophia stared sharply at her face. No—there was nothing behind: the girl's calm face spoke of no earthly passion.

'Is Kit thinking of some other girl?' she asked, still half suspicious.

‘I believe not. He is thinking of his work.’

‘Work is a fine servant but a bad mistress,’ said Sophia, shading her eyes to catch the effect. ‘There is no touch of Venus in such a mistress. My dear—here he comes. He looks serious enough for a converted clown. Only think how that solemn phiz used to light up with smiles unnumbered! Oh! Kit is too much converted. You must bring him back half-way at least.’

Kit lifted the latch of the gate and walked across the churchyard to join them. He certainly did exhibit a most remarkable solemnity.

‘For once,’ said Sophia, ‘you have torn yourself from your work. Take care, my son—life is not all work. There should be society in it—and a great variety of other interesting things.’

‘Yes—very likely. I came to ask a question.’

‘As many as you please, my dear Kit.’

‘The old man Pinder told me yesterday, being a little in his cups, a very queer story. It affects Denny Stirling—though he knows—or knew—nothing about it.’

‘What is the story?’

‘It is about the boy, Robbie Lythe. He says that you know the story. About his father and about Denny’s uncle—the man who made all the money.’

‘Oh! that old story. I thought you must have heard it, Kit. You know it, Geraldine?’

‘Oh!’ she replied carelessly, ‘I have heard there was a story—an old quarrel—a great wrong done, I believe; but I have never paid any attention to it.’

‘Yes,’ said Sophia, ‘there was a story; but it does not concern any of us. Robbie’s father, you know, went downhill very fast towards the end—poor dear Tom! You young people do not understand that we also have been young. The time seems so long ago, yet we have been young, like you. When we started on the race there was Sam Stirling, Denny’s uncle—Tom Lythe,—Harry Pinder—dear me! how ambitious and how clever he was in those days—and a great many more. And now where are they? In the race of life, my dears, it is a very odd thing to notice how the horses all set off running different ways.’

‘But the story?’

‘Oh! the story. Well, what matters the story? Robbie

knows nothing about it. Nobody now can tell whether it is true or whether it is false.'

'Pinder says,' Kit persisted, 'that Mr. Stirling stole an invention—stole it—and passed it off as his own, and so made the whole of his great fortune.'

He spoke with a heat that seemed hardly called for by the circumstances.

'I think he got it, somehow. Whether he stole it or not, I cannot say. Perhaps he bought it.'

'But—to leave this man to get poorer, and to do nothing for his son—'

'My dear Kit, the thing is done, and cannot be undone. I don't think, myself, that it is right to buy as cheap as you can and to sell as dear, because in such a transaction somebody must be robbed: but then I am not in business. At all events, it is always being done. Every day a picture is bought for a pound or two, and afterwards sold for hundreds. We cannot help it,' continued the wise woman, 'if men are so foolish as to sell their property for nothing.'

'Yet, if it were true, half of the estate, at least, should be given to this boy.'

'Nay—nay—consider. Poor Tom Lythe, with all his cleverness, could never have made a hundred pounds for himself. He was born to make fortunes for other people—'

'Yes, I say, the half—at least the half of the estate,' Kit insisted with strange pertinacity.

'Robbie might be made perfectly happy with much less than that,' said Geraldine. 'If he could only be taken from the City and sent to the South for the winter, he might pull through and last many years. It seems a little thing; but it is impossible.'

'Alas! it is indeed,' said the artist. 'Unless I could sell my pictures.'

'It shall be done, Geraldine.' Kit's face warmed up in quite the old way. It was just so that he spoke when he built up in dreams. 'It shall be done for him—I promise that it shall be done—a tardy act of partial reparation.'

'Well, but,' said Sophia, 'there is no necessity for you to make reparation. What have you to do with Mr. Stirling's injustices?'

'It shall be done, however.'

'Oh! they said the old Kit was quite gone,' said Geraldine. 'As if he could quite go! Sophia dear, he has got fifty pounds in the bank, and he is going to give them all to Robbie. I can read his thoughts, you see.'

Kit smiled, but gravely, and he said no more for the moment about Robbie. But he sat down between them and, very much in the old manner, began to talk.

'Let us be confidential,' he said. 'When we go back to town and to work, how are our prospects?'

'Gloomy, my son,' said Sophia. 'They are very gloomy. Find me, if you can, some quiet and delightful old almshouse: there must be a chapel, of course; a garden and a sundial. I should not in the least mind going into an almshouse, provided there were these essentials. I suppose they would let me bring my own easy-chair and a few little pretty things. I should make myself quite happy, and I should have no anxiety. But I confess that the prospect——' A look of pain crossed her face.

'Are things so very bad?'

'They could not be worse. Then there is Rosie—poor child!—she has not been making any real way lately. I do not know what will become of Rosie. Her heart is not in her work. It used to be with you, Kit.'

'It is no longer with me, I assure you. And you, Geraldine?'

'Well, Kit, if young people can be admitted to almshouses too, I should like a cottage next to Sophia's. But we have had a most delightful holiday. Whatever happens in the future, we shall remember this time. And it finishes, Kit, in the best way possible—with your success.'

He smiled gravely again and then, after a few moments of silence, he rose and walked slowly away.

'Kit's new dignity as yet sits strangely upon him,' said Geraldine.

'We loved the old Kit, my dear, and we have not yet got accustomed to the new. Oh! I confess that it is better that he should wake up and work. It is more dignified. And he is very, very clever; but he is not so picturesque—and, oh! my dear, he is not so affectionate. Denny, who is a darling, has all Kit's old affectionate way. Pity he is so rich!'

CHAPTER XV.

THE LAST DAY.

THE last day came : it always comes in the long run—this abominable last day—and then we discover, with Augustine, how short is that which hath an ending. Even the old, old man, the aged, aged Antediluvian, lamented that man should be cut off before a paltry thousand years were reached.

The last day of the holidays is, of all the days that come and go, the saddest. Going-away day is not nearly so bad : it is the last day, when one feels that the merry company are going to part immediately ; that this is the last chance we shall have to say what we ought to say to each other ; that the time can never quite come over again in the same way as we have enjoyed it. Other holidays there will be, let us hope ; other sweet places—other pleasant companies—await us still in the halting-places along the weary Haj, the pilgrim's way : but there will be something missing—some vanished face—some loss. The play-time is over—the holy play-time when we have all been so good, when no one has defrauded his neighbour, and there have been no hard-forced bargains, no fighting over the plunder, no robberies—in a word, no business. It is over, and on the morrow we must go. Let us wander hand-in-hand along the shore, and watch the rolling of the waves, and the white crests of the flying horses in the bay, and the vessels that pass to and fro : it is our last chance before we go back to the way of war and the windy talk of men. For six weeks we have been in this Garden of Eden : let us take one more walk in it before we go back to the town, and the stones of it, and the smoke of it, and the noise of it.

It was a melancholy party that gathered round the breakfast-table that morning ; but the saddest and gloomiest of all the faces was that of their host, the hitherto cheerful Denny.

'You reserve your best compliment for the last day, Denny,' said Sophia. 'You are cast down on our account, because we are sorry that it is over.'

'No,' he said. 'Am I not cast down on my own? A horrid depression weighs me down. The most delightful time I have ever had is over, and it can never come again—never—never!'

'Why should it never—never—never come again?' she echoed, smiling. 'Why are you so sure that it cannot come again?'

'That I cannot tell you; but it is gone, and another time as good can never come again.'

They all sighed with one consent—a deep, harmonious, melancholy sigh.

'We shall have it to remember,' said Sophia, 'in the cold, dark days of winter—in the fogs of the London streets we shall remember this lovely house, and the sunshine lying on the lawns—and the deep woods and the heath—we shall remember all.'

'We shall remember all,' they murmured with tearful eyes.

'And we shall remember—Denny,' said Sophia, laying her hand in his.

His eyes softened. Manhood forbids the cloud to fall in rain save in moments of the deepest emotion.

'But it is gone,' he said. 'What goes with it besides I shall find out to-morrow. Come,'—he looked up and laughed, the ghost of a laugh—'what must be, always is. Let us take sweet counsel together. We have a day before us—what shall we do with it? Let us make it like a Foresters' Gala-day at the Crystal Palace—brimful of things to do and things to see. Pity we haven't a steam merry-go-round! We will make it a memorable day.'

When the programme was complete, Denny left the girls to carry out the preliminary arrangements—stage properties are required for the simplest programme—and betook himself, his face lengthening with every step, to the library, where, as he expected, he found Kit hard at work, as usual.

'Old man,' he said, laying his hand on his shoulder, 'hadn't we better audit our accounts, so to speak—learn exactly what we have to face to-morrow?'

'Yes; I was going to say much the same thing. We've rather avoided the difficulty, haven't we? I am finishing off this paper for you. I think you will acknowledge that it

is, on the whole, the best thing you have done.' He took up a pile of MSS., and fondled the leaves affectionately. 'I cannot bear to let it go out of my hands. It is closely-reasoned and—— But you shall see—you shall see. I shall send it in for you to-night.'

'No, my friend,' said Denny; 'you will keep it and send it in under your own name, if it is to go in at all. But we will talk of this presently. First, let me render an account of my stewardship.'

'Don't vex me with the details of what you have given away.'

'Very well. But something you must know, otherwise you may be embarrassed; for, of course, you will have to drop down easily. Where shall I begin?' He sat down on the opposite side of the table and opened a drawer. 'Here you will find some papers which you had better read.'

'I don't think I shall. In general terms, you have been doing as much mischief with the money as you could.'

'Yes, my ideas of the rich man's responsibilities are not yours. I am not a political economist. Man, I find, obeys none of your laws. May I expound the views of an ignorant person?'

'Pray go on.'

'I look in the glass and I say, "Behold humanity!" I find that all I myself ask of life is, to be happy. I have no desire to work. I want love, fellowship, play, talk, music, wine, sunshine, woods, lawns, and pleasant places. These simple things make up life; but mostly love, fellowship, and play—I ask for nothing more. I want, I say, to be happy. Build me a system of economics upon that foundation, and I will look at it. Recognise the universal desire. Let work be only necessary work, and play the thing to which it leads. But you cannot do this: philosophers have never known what happiness is. There is not even any verb which expresses the universal desire; we have to make a verb. I want-to-be-happy; thou wantest-to-be-happy; he or she wants-to-be-happy; we all want-to-be-happy.'

'Political economy works for the general, not the individual, happiness.'

'Humanity doesn't care for the general, but for the individual. You who are rich may—nay, you must—make

others happy who are not. If you refuse, my Dives, you shall be deprived of your treasures; yea, you shall be cast into a lake of fire.'

'Suppose you take all my treasures and spend them in making fifty people happy, as you call it—that is, in giving them things which they have not earned,—what then?'

'Why, then they will have been happy. What else do you want?'

'For a little while.'

'Life itself is but for a little while. To be happy—to enjoy the things which we cannot earn, even for a day—is something in the brief span of life. Make us happy, Dives. We die and are forgotten—we and our works: the next generation follows with its works. The world repeats itself. Some men work and make money; some work and do not. Outside things change: shirtsleeves put on broadcloth; broadcloth is exchanged again for shirtsleeves. Always there is one cry, "Let us be happy—give us love, fellowship, and play." Thanks to the chance that came to me, I have given play-time to a few.'

'And now they must go back to work again no better off, but only the worse, because more discontented.'

'When I took over the temporary charge,' said Denny, returning to the question of his stewardship, 'you were giving nothing at all to anybody.'

'I was not. I support no cause, no society, no charity. Men must learn to combine. By combination everything can be effected; without it, nothing. Men must work out their own salvation for themselves. You cannot impose advancement; it must come from below. I strive for nothing but what can be applied to the whole community at the same time, such as education, and the teaching of principles and combination.'

'There are the papers!' Denny laid them on the table. 'The sum of it all is, that I have made several people happy. They were poor and in misery—misery undeserved. They are young people as well as old people. Whatever you do in the future, you can never escape from their gratitude. Ho! ho!' He put his hands in his pockets, and laughed. 'Dives, who was going to drive Lazarus from his door lest he should pick up the crumbs—a thing dead against the modern economy,—has gone out and invited Lazarus to

step inside: he has placed him in a warm bath, dressed his bad places with a little sulphate of zinc or vaseline, clothed him in a beautiful white robe, with a crown of roses, and set him down to a feast. Wonderful!

'Wonderful, indeed! Yet the laws remain.'

'And your example—the example of three months—to shame all rich men in every country.'

'I shall go abroad till it is all forgotten. Meantime, however, I have not done so very badly for you.'

'I know what you have done for me. You have pledged me to a pile of work which I cannot execute: you have converted me into a monster of industry: you have turned me into an orator and an advocate of impossible things. Very well, I shall just do nothing: I shall sit down. I shall just go to the Club as if these things hadn't happened—that is what I intend to do. In a week or two the men will leave off chaffing.'

'Nonsense! You will—you must—carry on the work I have started.'

'Carry on that work? I? Go about lecturing and preaching? Never.'

'This paper which I have finished for you—'

'Keep it for yourself—I shall go back to the rhyming and the little journalism; it is all I am fitted for. You can carry on this blessed work of yours under your own name.'

'That is impossible. My papers are absolutely identified with your name. Consider, a splendid beginning like this must not be thrown away. The principle—'

'I don't care twopence for the principle.'

'Then it is all lost and thrown away—all that I have done in the last three months!'

'What does that matter? What would it matter if everybody's work were lost and thrown away?'

'Oh!' cried Kit, fondling his precious manuscript. 'Can you not carry on some of the work? Will you suffer it all to be thrown away?'

'I can't help it. I could no more carry on this work of yours than you could write my songs. Be resigned: worse things have come out of this confounded exchange than the loss of your confounded work.'

'We ought to have considered at the outset: we ought to have laid down rules. However'—Kit sighed deeply—

'you are coming back to the old necessities, the old stimulus. I return to the load of wealth, and to work without a purpose or an aim. How much I envy you!'

Denny laughed scornfully.

'You envy me! If you only knew with what melancholy of spirit I return, you would not envy me.'

'As for me, my friend: in return for my three months of work, I can forgive you everything.'

'And I, for my part, can forgive you even for changing my style—I have had absolutely no work to do for three months. To think of it! In fact, I shall always be thinking of it. You've been fagging and trudging and whipping-up people to make them think as you want them to think: I've been sitting in my easy-chair, just making them do what I want them to do: I lift my little finger, and lo! this House of Holiday for these poor girls!'

'I fear I have not, perhaps, been so considerate as I should have been,' said Kit, softened. 'I ought to have known how lazy you were. But, indeed, the chance of work so filled me with a kind of rage that I have not been able to stop, and I quite forgot you, your style, your reputation, and everything.'

'And I too,' said Denny, 'have been to blame, perhaps. But remember, I, who never had a sixpence to spare, found myself the master of millions. I ought to have considered your opinions more. Forgive me.'

They shook hands over their reconciliation.

'And when you are back again,' said Denny, 'will you really do nothing with your money for anybody?'

'I adhere to my principles. But,' he added, with a little confusion, 'I find that there must be exceptions made, when one gets to know people—when one learns certain stories—in short—there is that boy, Robbie Lythe.'

'You have heard the story about him? I hoped that you would not hear it. Perhaps it isn't true.'

'True or not, the boy shall be cared for. Send for him—promise for him whatever you please.'

'Yet, consider, the example of his sufferings would be so useful a lesson to all his friends.'

'Then there is Sophia Gentry: you shall do what you will for her. Do not suffer her to have any fear for the future.'

'Yet, consider—the poverty of this poor lady can but teach other ladies to be less incompetent.'

'As for that other business,' said Kit penitently, 'I am afraid I have botched that for you; but, indeed, I could not help it.'

'No; that is botched indeed.' There was no necessity to name the business. 'Man! I don't care twopence for the other difficulties—I can get over them in a month. But this is different. What is to be done with this? I see no way out of it; I shall never get over it, I fear. Kit Cotterel is packed off—bundled out—cleared out like a sack of rubbish. She despises him: she hates him. I shouldn't mind her hatred, because hatred might always turn again to love; but she despises him. Love can never survive contempt. I am done for—done for.'

'Well'—Kit showed little sympathy with this aspect of the case—'suppose you have lost her: after all, there are other girls.'

'None that I want.'

'Why, man, look round you. Have you no eyes?'

'Except for Rosie, none.'

'There is one girl in this house as far above Rosie Romaine as——'

'Who can be above her?'

'You have known her all your life—you played with her: why, you used to tell her all your ambitions and your plans.'

'You mean Geraldine?'

'Of course I mean Geraldine. You have had this beautiful, this sympathetic, this divine girl beside you all these years, and you actually have not fallen in love with her!'

'Fall in love with Geraldine?' Denny laughed pleasantly. 'That is quite as impossible as to win back the other. We have always been friends too close for love. I used to tell her everything, as you say—my little ambitions, in the days when I still had ambitions. Poor, dear Geraldine! I fear I have been a sad disappointment to her. She would persist in expecting great things of me. But, in love with Geraldine? That would be impossible.'

'Can there be such a man?' Kit asked of the heavens and the wide, wide world—gazing around him.

'Besides, there was Rosie—little Rosie—the plague and

torment of my life: we quarrelled every other day, and made it up again with kisses. Poor, dear Rosie—and now I have made her heart bleed. Poor child! What can I say? what can I say?

CHAPTER XVI.

THE LAST EVENING.

It seemed understood as the day went on that everybody was also to have a few minutes' private talk with Denny. He held a kind of reception in the library, one following the other at intervals. Some came to thank him for private and separate kindnesses—how else could so many new frocks have come into existence? Some came to thank him for the lovely time they had had. Some came to say that they were going back to hard and ill-paid drudgery with new courage and hope. Some spoke with tears. Not one but spoke out of a full heart.

Among them came Mr. Pinder. It was half-an-hour or so before luncheon time, a period of the day when this good man was always most depressed. His latest drink—unless, as sometimes happened, he had taken a glass of beer in the morning—dated ten or eleven hours back, and he was therefore at dead low tide.

'I am better for my stay,' he said, though in the whole course of a long life he had never been anything but perfectly well and strong. 'But the Theatre calls loudly for me to return. There are new pieces coming out everywhere. I must get back to work.'

'Well, work seems to agree with you.'

'It is not work,' said the critic, 'that hurts a man, it is not getting enough work. When one is seventy, the younger men cut in and take the best part of the work. It is the universal law. The world belongs to the young—and to the old man who has not been able to save, there is an evil that the physicians cannot cure.' He glanced at a cheque-book lying on the table. Perhaps, he thought, it had already been used for some of those women, who would wheedle this poor young man out of his last farthing. 'Cannot cure,' he repeated in hollow tones.

Denny laughed.

'I think I know one remedy,' he said. 'An alleviation, at least. Come, old chap, how much will you borrow? How much shall I lend?'

The Fine Art critic hesitated. With such a chance one should not be too modest. Yet he hesitated. Then he blushed rosy-red—see how young doth Art still keep her followers!—and boldly plunged.

'I would borrow,' he said, 'no more than my needs demand, no more than I can repay. A man may borrow without loss of self-respect.' Perhaps he meant that the loss of the self-respect came in with the repayment. 'Lend me, my friend,—lend me—thirty pounds.'

When he left the room with that cheque in his pocket, his conscience smote him because he hadn't made it fifty.

Then came Robbie Lythe. As yet he had not heard what was to happen to him, and he was plunged in melancholy at the prospect before him.

'Understand clearly, Robbie boy'—for he stood in a dream, not able to realize what was given to him—'you shall never go back to the City. You are free—you have no work to do. In the winter you shall go to Egypt, or the Riviera, or Algiers: in the summer you shall write verses and live among your friends. You are to have an income of whatever will be found sufficient for everything.'

'I cannot understand. You do not mean it!'

'Go, Robbie. Tell Geraldine, and ask her to interpret and tell you what it means. Go—you are a free man.'

Then Geraldine herself came.

'Oh!' she said, 'what is this that you have done for Robbie? Is it all true—quite true? Denny, you have saved his life! Oh! and I thought you so cold, because you must have known that he would die if he went back to his work, and yet you offered to do nothing. Yet why should you? Robbie is nothing to you. To Kit and to me he has been a great deal always. We love him. But he has been nothing to you, which makes your kindness the more wonderful.'

'That is settled then, and we need no more thanks; and perhaps the boy will grow stronger in time. Geraldine, is it really, do you think, all over between Kit and Rosie?'

'I fear so. He is quite cold about it. And she is quite determined.'

'Do you think that time——'

'No. I am sure that time will never help. It is a rupture complete. She has quite given him up, and that without an apparent struggle. She does not seem even to suffer any pain. It is as if Kit, who is so much changed, is no longer the man she loved.'

Denny made no reply.

In the afternoon a little drawing-room comedy, written by Denny, was performed by the author and by Rosie. It came off with great applause—never had Rosie played any part better. Then dinner, which followed the comedy, was animated and even gay. After dinner they had a little music and singing.

When that began, Kit, who could never now be made to play or sing—he, who formerly had been always singing, stepped out of the room into the garden. Here he found Geraldine alone. Perhaps he knew that she was there.

'I was thinking,' she said, 'things turn out so strangely. We come here expecting nothing but a few weeks' holiday, and the whole current of our lives is changed. We leave you in London, and you are suddenly transformed. We find here another copy of your old self, as bright and clever—and sometimes as careless and frivolous. We come with heavy hearts, thinking that nothing could save poor Robbie, and, behold! his life is at least prolonged, and he will have no more anxiety. When we came, you were in love and Rosie was happy. Now——'

'Now, Rosie is no longer in love and I am happy. Never mind about Rosie or the past. Let us talk—of ourselves—Geraldine.'

There was a change in his voice which ought to have given her warning. But she was one of those girls who do not easily notice such warnings.

'In the old times I used to walk and talk with you and tell you my little thoughts.'

'They were great thoughts, Kit.'

'And then I began to make songs—those fatal songs!—and the ambitions disappeared, and you have been ashamed of me ever since.'

'Disappointed—not ashamed, Kit.'

'The old times. It is pleasant to think and talk of them, is it not? before Rosie—before anything else came between us. She is gone now, and I am free. Geraldine, we are free.'

Just then the touch of a manly hand fell upon the piano in the drawing-room, and Denny's voice was heard carolling a song—one of Kit's old songs :

'She is not a country damsel, but a sweet
And a dainty maid of lordly London town :
She cannot call the cows, and her feet
Seldom stray on breezy moor or lofty down :
She never carried milk pails on her head,
And she cannot churn the butter or the cheese :
She never tossed the hay or made the bread,
And I know she'd be afraid to drive the geese.'

'Listen!' said Geraldine. 'If it were not for the voice, which is not yours, one might say that here was Kit himself enjoying the thing that he once seemed most to love—the applause of those who heard him sing. Why, the song is yours! You wrote it two or three years ago and showed it to me. I thought at the time that to go on writing such easy trifles in rhyme was quite unworthy of your powers, and my heart sank, I remember, because you were so proud of the lines. But I was afraid to say what I thought. And you were already twenty-five.'

'And now I am twenty-seven. Time to change, was it not?'

The singer went on with his foolish ditty, rolling it out as if he loved the rhyme, and the music and his own voice, and as if everybody else must love them all, too :

'Upon the sunny side of Regent Street,
Where the lovely things in stately shops are shown,
There I linger when my purpose is to meet
This shepherdess of lordly London town.
And her cheek is just as rosy, and her eyes
Are just as bright as any maid can show ;
And sure no country miss in such a guise,
And apparelled with such dainty art, could go.'

'Oh, Kit! And all the time you were building a temple of air and light, just as when you began. But your temple was becoming, alas! more and more like a public-house, and

your muse more and more like a barmaid. Oh, Kit! and we who loved you and hoped so much of you!

Then the singer's voice rose again, and he sang the third verse:

'She's as wise and she's as witty as she's good :
She is sunny as the sunshine, and as free :
She will lose her heart some day—as she should—
But I'm sure I hope she won't, except to me.
For her sweet sake I love both square and street ;
Yea, every street of lordly London town :
And her first and Christian name is Marguerite,
And her surname will—perhaps—be—soon—my own.'

'When I read those lines to you, Geraldine,' said Kit, with softened voice—yet she suspected nothing—'was it in the Square garden?'

'Yes; and in May, when the lilacs filled the air and the laburnum was in blossom.'

'And—and—was I mad? was I dreaming? Did no thought cross your mind, Geraldine—playmate and friend—that the words might have a—a—meaning—a deeper meaning between you and me, I mean?'

'No—Kit—why? They were a song written by you—only a song. Besides—'

'Sometimes men get mad and do mad things. Sometimes they pass over the flowers lying at their feet and go to pick flowers not half so sweet in other fields. Sometimes—'

'Kit, I don't know you to-night. What are you saying?'

'It is because I don't know myself. Geraldine, it is because I am free.'

'Free?'

'I am free—and I have awakened at last.' He caught both her hands and held them tightly. 'Oh! I have been blind—blind! Geraldine, it is you I love—you—you!'

'Kit, let me go. Oh! Kit, you must not.'

'I must—I will! Forgive me for the wasted years. They shall be wasted no longer. You shall guide me and inspire me, my dear.'

She resisted no longer while he held her in his arms and kissed her.

He forgot everything: the explanations that would have to be made—the approaching return to his own personality—the risks and the difficulties—he was quite carried away.

'Oh! Kit,' the girl murmured. 'Are you sure—are you really sure—that Rosie no longer. . . . Oh! what will she say? And on the very day after!'

'It shows the sincerity of the separation: it shows the reality of my love. Dear, let us not think of Rosie. Let us talk of the future. Let us talk of love.'

'My dear,' said the happy lover half-an-hour afterwards. 'There will be a great deal to tell you in a day or two. Perhaps you will be surprised—even distressed at first.'

'No,' she said, 'you cannot distress me, Kit.'

'It is about Denny Stirling and myself. You have noticed a certain resemblance. Do you like him?'

'I like him for his generosity. He is certainly a most generous man. But he wants earnestness.'

'If he were to become suddenly earnest, could you—do you think a girl might love him?'

'Perhaps. I do not care to ask. As for me—why, what a question!'

'What if he were to become earnest?' Kit persisted.

'Kit, can't you understand that some things are impossible under any circumstances?'

'But you knew me when I was in the same idle vein.'

'Yes, and I knew you before. I knew of what great things you are capable, Kit.'

The lover suddenly let her hand, which he had been holding, fall, and walked away.

The girl sat waiting for him, wondering what was in his mind. Presently he came back.

'Geraldine,' he said, his voice constrained, 'Geraldine—whatever happens—we have had this evening. . . . Oh! my dear—my dear.'

'This,' said Denny, panting, 'is the most delightful waltz I have ever had.'

His partner sighed.

'And now there will be no more dances,' she said.

'Why no more dances?'

'Because there never are any. Who is to give a dance among us? Why, we all live in cheap lodgings. You *can't* dance in cheap lodgings. Shall we have one more turn?'

Geraldine was playing, and over the piano Kit leaned, watching her with yearning eyes.

'There'—as the music stopped—'that waltz is another thing of the past.'

'Shall you remember it?' Denny whispered.

'I shall remember the whole of this day.'

'Let us go outside. It is cool. We may pursue our studies in Natural History. Perhaps we shall find that glowworm.'

Rosie hesitated—with the usual consequences.

'Tell me once more,' said Denny, 'would it be quite impossible—even if Kit came back—his once self—his former self?'

'It is very good of you to persist in favour of your friend; but I have already told you a dozen times—it is quite impossible.'

'Not if he came dancing and laughing—with the old light in his eyes?'

'Oh! if you still persist——'

She turned as if she was going back to the house.

'No—no! Oh! you don't understand. Rosie, I have never, never ceased for a single moment to love you.'

'You?'

'You are horribly mistaken. It is not Kit who has ceased to love you.'

'No—he is changed. I believe he is changed into you. I don't understand what you are talking about.'

'He is—he is changed. It is I who love you now. Rosie, best and sweetest of girls, it is I who love you always—always.'

He folded her in his arms just as Kit had been wont to do, and kissed her just in Kit's old form—with the same ardour and the same impetuosity.

'Oh!' she murmured, 'what does it mean? Denny, how can you love me, when you know that I am only just released from Kit?'

'I am none other than Kit.'

'How can you say such things? You are Denny.'

He held her in his arms.

'How shall I make her understand?' he said. 'There will be a time for explanation next week—many weeks after next week—only believe that I love you, Rosie, better than you were ever loved before.'

'But oh!' she said, 'you are so rich and I am so poor—and they will say——'

'What do I care what they say? Besides, I am not so rich. Oh! I will explain it all soon. My dear, can you love me?'

She made no reply. But she left her hand in his, and one needs no other answer.

'But tell me,' she said again, 'why you keep on saying that you are the same as Kit? You are not—you are not! I could not love you if I had not forgotten Kit. You are Denny—you are tall and handsome. How could I think I loved that poor Kit? And oh! how can you love me when you know that once I thought I loved that other man? I wonder you do not despise me.'

'Rosie!' he groaned, 'your words pierce my heart. How can I explain? What shall I say? What have I done? What will become of us?'

At two o'clock in the morning there were left in the drawing-room only the two young men. They glared guiltily at each other.

'I am afraid,' said Kit, with manifest unwillingness, 'that there is more trouble before us.'

'What's that?'

'Why—oh! no doubt a few words of explanation will make all clear. As soon as we are again exchanged we can have a little interview—both together—with—with the young lady.'

'What the Devil have you done now?' cried Denny.

'I admire Geraldine above any other woman that I have ever seen. I admired her from the first moment that I saw her. She is the only woman with whom I could pass my life.'

'Well?'

'Well, I have told her so—and she thinks it is Kit himself—and she has accepted me. I ought to be the happiest of mortals, but I am not, because to-morrow I shall be Denny Stirling, and I have gathered that she is prejudiced against you—or him—or me. Says that Denny reminds her of Kit at his worst.'

'Geraldine has accepted me?'

'No—me. But she will want this little explanation.'

Denny smote his brow with an interjection not found in the grammar or taught in the schools or permitted in the play-ground, and rushed from the room.

CHAPTER THE LAST.

TAKE YOUR FREEDOM.

EARLY in the morning, before the maids were about, Denny came downstairs, dressed, and sallied forth into the garden. His face was pale, and despair sat upon his brow. Dark rings were round his eyes. He stood upon the terrace, looking about him. Then he tossed his arms as one who is in great trouble of mind. William, the under-gardener, who was mowing the lawn, thought his master must really be having 'em again; otherwise why should he look so queer, and throw about his arms?

There was, however, one more person up and out. This was none other than Kit. He had been out half an hour or more already. Presently, seeing Denny, he came forth, shamefaced.

'You here?' Denny cried.

'Yes, I am here. I was restless; I got up early,' said Kit gloomily. 'I have not slept a single wink the whole night for thinking.'

'Nor have I. What shall we do?'

'Let us consider the situation from the outside,' said Denny, endeavouring after impartiality. 'Let us put it before ourselves plainly and without the least reserve.'

'Well then, let us try.'

'Last night, when you told me about Geraldine and yourself I ran away, because I was afraid—yes, I was actually afraid to tell you what had happened to me only an hour or two before. It complicates the situation horribly.'

'Not fresh troubles?'

'Yes, fresh troubles. I was resolved, I told you, to explain everything to Rosie. I tried to make her understand, but I couldn't. And last night, driven to despair, I tried again. I told her that I had never ceased to love her. I told her, as plainly as I could speak, that I was, in fact, the real Kit, who had never changed in mind; and when I thought she was on the straight track for understanding, I—I—in fact—I kissed her, and then I found that she hadn't understood anything at all. And now she believes that she is engaged to Denny Stirling.'

'Understand me,' said Kit firmly, 'no power on earth shall make me marry Rosie.'

'And understand me. Not for worlds would I marry Geraldine.'

'I do not intend to let you.'

There was silence. The men were resolute.

'Well, what is to be done?' asked Denny. 'It won't help us to quarrel. What can be done?'

'I don't know. At least, the only thing——' He looked wistfully at his friend, and paused.

'Let us once more try to face the situation. Geraldine will never listen to Denny Stirling. Rosie will never listen to Kit.'

'That is the plain truth. You couldn't put the case more plainly.'

'As for the work you have done in my name, I shall not carry it on. I shall let it drop. This is a short and easy way out of the difficulty. Better than long-winded explanations.'

'That won't help us with the girls.'

'No, it won't. And now there is no time for anything to be done. It is the most horrible difficulty. Suppose we go on as we are for another three months.'

'What is the good of that? Geraldine will become more attached to me, and Rosie to you. An extension of time will only make things worse. As for changing at all,' said Kit, 'I don't want to change. I am quite comfortable as I am. I shall be extremely sorry to give you up. I feel as if I could stay here altogether. The mansion, so to speak, is comfortable and sound. The necessity of daily work is a most delightful stimulus, and I really associate this frame—this lodging—not you at all—with the success which has attended my three months of work.'

'Well?'

'I have won for you an excellent character,' said Kit severely. 'As for your new style, I should like you to compare your former style, slipshod and ungrammatical, with your later, clean and correct.'

Denny grunted.

'We must change back,' Kit repeated, with a look of inquiry. 'That is inevitable, of course. I suppose that we must change back again.'

'It will be horrid,' said Denny. 'I believe you've set everybody's back up with your priggish airs.'

'If you come to that,' returned the other, 'I suppose you think it will be a pleasant thing for me to find myself transformed into a *he Lady Bountiful*.'

'Ah!' said Denny humbly, 'there I feel as if I hadn't done enough. I ought to have made a much better use of the opportunity. Perhaps I have partly failed to rise to the situation. Yet I think I have done nearly all that could be expected of a man who has always regarded a bank-note with awe, and a hundred pounds, all in a lump, as like unto an inaccessible peak. You will forgive me for not making a better use of my time?'

'We won't re-open that question,' said Kit. 'Look here, all the rest could be got over; but this business of the girls can't.'

'No, it can't. I see no way out of it—none at all, except more explanations, a blazing row, and perhaps the influence of time.'

'Time will do no good in this case. Geraldine, poor girl'—his voice broke—'she thinks that Kit is changed for good. When she sees him fall back into the old courses, it will break her heart.'

'But you must tell her.'

'You have tried telling Rosie, and she didn't understand. Do you believe that anybody will understand? It is an old story—an "Arabian Night" story: the Jinn and King Solomon exchange bodies—King Robert is turned out of his body by the angel—everybody knows the story by heart; but nobody will believe it in these days. We may go on explaining till we are black in the face! Geraldine will only go on believing that Kit has gone back to his frivolous and idle courses because he was tired of being serious and industrious.'

'And Rosie will go on believing that Denny, to whom she was engaged, has treated her with the same icy coldness as she experienced from Kit. Good heavens! A second time! It is enough to kill her.'

'Then, again, what is to be done?'

There was silence.

'My friend,' said Kit, after a pause, 'I have been thinking this matter over all night.'

'So have I.'

'And I have found a way out of it—the only way. I trust to your calm, cold reason, although it certainly entails upon you a great sacrifice, to adopt my way.'

'Any way—any way—never mind the sacrifice, if it will only make Rosie happy.'

'There is this way left. To remain exactly as we are.'

'What!'

'We must not change at all. That is the only way. We must remain as we are. We must somehow make it impossible that there should be any change.'

'Oh! that is impossible.'

'On the contrary, quite possible.'

'What! Am I to rob you of your fortune?'

'The fortune has never brought me any happiness. Take it—take the paltry money and welcome to it.'

'He calls a fortune of three millions "the paltry money!" No, my friend; I can do much for you, but this I cannot do.'

'You must.'

'I will not.'

'You shall. Consider, there is Geraldine. She will certainly—most certainly break her heart if you do not consent. And there is Rosie—to be treated a second time to neglect and coldness. Oh! it would be the most cruel, the most outrageous thing. And it will certainly happen, because I really will not undertake again to look the lover. I have tried once and I have failed. I could not try again. As for your misery and mine, I do not speak, we need not consider them.' This is always a safe and conventional thing to say—a thing that the pit quite understands, though dismal looks proclaim that the speaker is considering his own misery very much indeed. 'The exchange, I say, is so vastly to my advantage that I hardly dare to propose it. My fortune in exchange for my work! It is giving an oyster-shell for the mines of Potosi.'

'Absurd! There are three millions of money—three great massive millions!'

'What is money compared with the great cause which I have begun to preach?'

'Well, and how is one to give up one's own self—one's memories?'

'You won't. After a bit you will clean forget your old self. Don't let that trouble you. And think of Rosie. She likes wealth: she will delight in soft and luxurious ease and idleness.'

'She would.'

'And with her always at your side,' the tempter continued, 'think of the beautiful verses you would write with no pressure from without—no trouble about making money. I believe there is an opening just now for a society poet. The post is vacant, step into it.'

'If I consented, it would be under conditions. You would have to take two-thirds of the money.'

'Not a sixpence—not a penny. It is against my principles. There should be no rich men at all. When the present race of rich men dies out there shall be no more. Besides, I must have the stimulus of necessity: without necessity there can be no good work. No conditions.'

'Then flatly, I cannot.'

Upon this Kit, with a silver tongue and the pertinacity of a mosquito, began all over again to argue it out.

Once more Denny refused except upon conditions.

Again Kit began. This time he drew so moving a picture of what he intended to do—what he could not choose but do: how his eyes, ice-cold and strange, would once more greet the lover-like eyes of the unfortunate girl, mocked and insulted a second time: how her reason would totter and give way, how she would linger bereft of reason till death released her—and all—everything—all this misery because her lover refused to accept a fortune.

'Well,' said Denny at length, moved to submission by this terrible prospect, 'I agree.'

Once more they shook hands.

'And now,' said Kit, 'I suppose nothing is to be done.'

'Nothing—except, perhaps, to avoid the mesmeric sleep and to break this phial.'

He drew the box from his pocket and dropped the bottle on the stones of the terrace. Denny felt a curious faintness and dizziness; in a few moments he saw nothing. Then he recovered, and saw his friend Kit looking about him as if asking if anything had happened.

'Denny, my friend,' he said, 'why are you up so early? It is only half-past seven. Has anything happened?'

'I seem to have been restless. And you?'

'General nervousness. Too much work, perhaps. Let us take a sharp walk before breakfast.'

'What a pretty box!' said Denny, picking up a carved sandal-wood box. 'And who has been breaking bottles on the terrace?'

'It's very odd,' Kit replied. 'I must be nervous. A kind of a sort of—a—a—half-idea or imperfect recollection crossed my mind just as you spoke, as if I knew the meaning of that box. Never mind the thing! It belongs, I suppose, to one of the girls. How sweet and fresh is the morning-air! Denny, I wish you could sympathize a little with my work and my principles! I should like to convert you above all things. A rich man among us is impossible. Once converted, you would hand over all your money to the State.'

'Thank you, Kit. No! I shall keep my money, and use it for the individuals—myself and Rosie first. I should like to use a great deal of it for Rosie. She shall go dressed in silk attire—in silk attire,' he repeated, singing the words.

'You are pretty changed, old man.'

'If you come to that, so are you.'

'It was time for me to work, wasn't it?'

'The old careless Kit was perhaps the more interesting. As for me, love has done it; that, and an improved view of responsibilities, which I owe to you, Kit, before your new departure.'

'The new departure! Well, I have Geraldine for my companion and for solace. A woman may not lead or guide, but she may accompany and she may console. To think that I should have been blind for all these years! I shall get married as soon as I can. As for the club and the fellows there, I have already dropped them. Poor old Pinder is really too much for anybody. Did he impetrate a loan?'

'He did!'

They turned up at breakfast, fresh, smiling, and happy. And, though all the rest were saddened by the approaching break-up, these two young men preserved a cheerfulness that, under the circumstances, was curious. But it was felt to be a compliment to the two girls.

As a general rule, things spoken seriously, earnestly, or, we say, from the heart, ought not to be spoken at breakfast, or at lunch, or even at dinner, because of the dreadful flatness which falls upon the rest of the day. The evening is the time for emotions. On this occasion, however, an hour or so before the train which should take them away, it was permitted to Denny to speak, after breakfast, a few words of meaning.

'My dear friends,' he said, looking around him, 'since yesterday morning, when we were all so dismal, a most curious thing has happened: I don't quite know what, but I feel an immense relief. It seemed to me, then—I don't know why—as if everything was all over, and nothing worth having could ever happen again. Now, I understand that we are only beginning, and I've got to tell you something that will please you, I hope. Sophia is going to stay here as *chatelaine*, and this house will be kept open all the year round. Let us fill it with people who have been pining for sunshine and a holiday, and a little rest and happiness. After breakfast, Sophia is going to unpack her things. Robbie, my boy, you had better stay here, too, until the cold weather begins.'

They all pressed round him saying kind things. But the tears rose to the eyes of some.

'You have done for me what you little expected,' Denny went on. 'Let me confess. Before you came, I was growing morose—the burden of great riches proved greater than I could bear. I had no duties and no responsibilities. You have made me understand that such a man as myself can have no use at all in the world but to make some few happier. I must not waste the money, but I may use it to make some few happier. We will leave Kit, with his new philosophy, to look after the common weal. I shall content myself with individuals. He may work for humanity—I will work for humans. He may contend that no one ought to be rich. Very good—I shall not argue with him. I am rich. I accept the situation—and without quarrelling with the social arrangements which made that possible. But we cannot be rich all to ourselves. That is the great discovery of the last three months—since you good people came here. And I owe it all to Kit, as well as his idle rhyme and his music, and many other things. Shall I make an ill use of

my treasure if I apply it to extend—ever so little—the play-time of the world?”

‘Oh! the play-time,’ said Rosie. ‘Do let us give a play-time to as many as we can.’

‘It is to brighten their lives. What does your foolish song say, Kit?’

“Life is long—for those who toil not;
Only long—for those who play.”

Kit laughed, but soberly.

‘Yes,’ he said, ‘that was in my play-time. Now I am going to preach the doctrine that no one ought to be allowed to become rich. Thus——’

Sophia, who was beside him, kindly laid her hand upon his lips; and so the rest of that sermon was lost.

‘And my explanations?’ asked Rosie, as soon as she was alone with her lover, who really had all Kit’s good qualities and none of his faults. ‘Where are the promised explanations?’

‘The explanations? Oh! yes.’ He took both her hands. ‘Once there was a young man who fell in love with a girl at first sight. They do sometimes. They are made that way. But there was another fellow—and so he wouldn’t speak—and he and the other fellow getting mixed, you see—and what with one fellow changing his views and another his style, and one improving his ways and the other his manners——’

‘I quite see,’ said Rosie, ‘and the rest will keep. I don’t want any more explanations, if only—only—if you truly love me, Denny.’

He had to postpone this assurance, because Kit and Geraldine came in—and she was dressed for travelling.

‘Kit,’ said Rosie in her softest voice—in her most affectionate manner—in her most caressing way—‘dear Kit, I understand everything at last. Let us continue friends. Perhaps, unconsciously, we deceived each other. Let us continue friends for auld lang syne, and for Geraldine’s sweet sake.’

THE DEMONIAK

CHAPTER I.

HOW THE THING CAME.

A LITTLE knot of half-a-dozen men sat or lounged about the room. They had been sitting there all the evening. Some smoked cigarettes, more ruinous to the nerves than opium ; some took their tobacco in ancient fashion, with a pipe. On the table stood two or three bottles of Apollinaris, and a bottle of whisky, newly opened for some young profligate who still dared to take it with his Apollinaris, in spite of public opinion. These men constituted the best set in the College : that was acknowledged by themselves. All were reading men, and all good men. They talked of literature, art, music, and poetry with equal readiness, and always with that fine breadth of handling and those vigorous, certain strokes which belong especially to their time of life. No critic so unrelenting as the critic of twenty-one : no demand for style more exacting than that of this critic. We lower our demands as we grow older and perceive that they are impossible. Just in the same way, we start with the belief that every great man is a hero : that every beautiful woman is an angel : that everything is possible to our own intellect : and that life is long enough to satisfy all our desires—all—all—even the boundless desires of youth.

So they talked, these young men : sometimes they were cynical, as some young men love to be ; sometimes the enthusiasm of youth flared up, and they were carried far above the region of the cynic, into the atmosphere of faith and hope. And when the college clock struck twelve, and one

man got up and said it was time for bed, everybody felt that the evening had passed away too quickly—as is, indeed, the case with every beautiful evening, and more especially the evening of life. Then the tenant of the rooms was left lone.

His name was George Humphrey Atheling. He lay back in his easy-chair, loath to go to bed. The College, when the footsteps of the departing men ceased upon the stairs, became perfectly quiet. He was, after a little while, the only man out of bed. The candles on the table were burning low.

‘I suppose I must go,’ he murmured with a sigh.

Yet he lingered. He got up, however, and looked out of the window, which he threw open. The night air—it was early in the month of May—blew fresh and cold upon his cheek: the broad lawns of the Fellows’ Garden stretched at his feet in the moonlight, the two great walnut-trees casting black shadows: beyond the lawns the flower-beds and shrubs lay massed together in black and white. He sighed again, being a little tired, and shut the window.

Yet he made no haste to get into bed. For some reason or other, he did not want to go to bed: the thought of bed made him uneasy. He was nervous this evening; he had become, since his friends left him, suddenly and strangely excited. Yet why? There was absolutely no reason why he should not lie down at once and go to sleep as usual. Nobody slept better or more readily than this young man. Nothing had happened to excite him or make him nervous. He had not been reading too hard—George was one of those happily-constituted persons who never read too hard. He had not been smoking too much—a couple of pipes is not excessive; he had certainly not been drinking—George never did drink. He had not been gambling—he never did gamble, unless you call sixpenny points at whist gambling for a man who has seven thousand pounds a year of his own. George Atheling was a perfectly healthy, steady, and well-balanced young man, who had been at a school where the masters are said to have the greatest possible influence—and the best possible influence—over the boys, and are themselves, one and all, as remarkable for virtue as they are for football. For, if he lacked principle—a thing which one would be sorry to affirm—such a young man would make up for the defect by deeper reverence for Form. For, many things

which afford the greatest gratification to the baser sort are regarded by such young men as beneath contempt, if only because they are bad Form. Almost everything is bad Form which pleases the great mass of mankind. Only those things are to be followed which advance the development or cultivation of the soul, a thing which every young man must especially regard with jealousy. It will be perceived that this kind of teaching may very well convert a healthy boy into a self-conscious prig: in fact, it very often does. That is its weak side. On the other hand, when you have got a strong brain to deal with, there is no better way of beginning the world than to start with an immense respect for your own possibilities.

George Atheling, owing to this enormous respect for himself, read diligently for honours, desiring to get a First Class. It is always good for a young man, at the outset, to have a First Class behind him: it illustrates these possibilities in him. For the same reason, he cultivated literature, art, and music. That is to say, he conscientiously ploughed through the Masters, and endeavoured, as yet with small success, to understand what constitutes a good picture and what a sonata should suggest and teach. In some athletics he was good, especially in rowing: he spoke at the Union rather stiffly, but after careful preparation of his speech. It was understood that he would certainly enter upon a political career, and his friends believed that he would quickly step to the front and become a great statesman. It is astonishing to reflect upon the magnificence of the careers prophesied for certain undergraduates by their friends. If only half the greatness were really to come off, the country would not be big enough to contain all its great men. But though events do not come off exactly as they are prophesied, there are, as in every other condition of things, compensations. Many of the men, for instance, continue to believe in their own possible greatness, and are thereby made happy. Fate or accident has prevented them from receiving the world's acknowledgment of their greatness; but all the same they are kings of men; they are the unappreciated prophets.

Had George Atheling continued in the line of life which he had laid down for himself, he would have gained his First Class: he would have been called to the Bar: he would

have entered the House of Commons: and then—— But one cannot tell what might have happened afterwards. Only one thing is certain, that the school priggishness would have been shaken off at an early period. A man of his bodily strength could never become a prig. Heard one ever of a great, strong man continuing in the paths of the prig?

But he did not continue in that line of life. A thing happened to him, this very night, which was destined to change his line of life altogether; a very strange and terrible thing; a thing which he had never suspected, dreaded, or anticipated; a thing of which he had never heard.

Understand, to begin with, that there were no premonitions; also, that he had no anxieties of any kind; that he was perfectly happy, and satisfied with himself, his lot, and his expectations; that he had heaps of money; that he had no bad brothers, elder or younger; that he had no foolish virgins for sisters; that he was twenty-one years of age; that he was perfectly sound and strong—a goodly and a proper young man. These things must all be clearly understood.

To look at, he was a very fine young man. He stood over six feet in height, and for breadth of shoulder, depth of chest, solidity of legs and arms, was built for two inches more at least. Everything about him was modelled on a gigantic scale: his hands were big, his fingers long and strong; his limbs were huge; his head was big, his features were strong and distinct; his short hair curled all over his head, for the very strength of it. He rowed five in the college boat, and had refused a place in the 'Varsity trial eights.

Nothing wrong about this young man at all. Nature had fashioned him in her kindest mood: nothing at all wrong. Nature is so seldom in a really kindly mood. For upon one she bestows an asthma, on another gout, on a third rheumatism, on a fourth neuralgia: to speak only of nervous complaints which lie dormant for many years, and break out when one grows older. Another she afflicts with short sight, partial deafness, a stammer, a squint, or some other little defect or deformity which all through life shall prohibit perfect enjoyment. Others she endows with poverty, coupled with ambition; or with obscure origin, coupled with poor cousins in multitudes; or with stupidity, coupled with

rank which demands great parts. This young man she endowed with great riches, good birth, perfect health of body—so far as he himself or the world could understand—a strong brain, industry, and resolution, and ambition : what more can Nature possibly do for any man? One thing more she can do. She can make him one of those who speak the great English language, and belong to one of the two great English nations. And this, too, Nature did for George Atheling.

As he turned from the window his eyes fell upon an unopened letter on the mantelshelf. He took it and glanced at the handwriting.

‘It is from Elinor,’ he said, and tore it open.

‘DEAREST GEORGE,’ it began, with affectionate familiarity—‘I think that I have at last succeeded in overcoming all scruples. My mother has given her consent at last; the pater has never really objected. I am to enter Newnham in October. As I shall be eighteen in September, I may be supposed, at least, to know my own mind. I am getting on very well with my “coach,” who is a delightful old gentleman, and a miracle of learning. My Latin prose still leaves a good deal to be desired. In Greek I am doing much better. I work all day long, except for my two hours of exercise—which everybody, especially my coach, insists upon my taking every day. I ride or play tennis. Oh! I am full of ambition and of hopes! We shall be undergraduates together, but you will be in your third year while I am in my first. You will look down upon me. Never mind!

‘You dear old boy, I mean to get my First Class, too. The way has been shown by other women. I will be a First Class in Honours, if only to stand on the same intellectual level as my husband. He shall not be able to talk about things of which I understand nothing. What you read, I will read. I will be your companion and your equal: I will take my place beside you, not behind you. I could not marry a man who would look down upon me from heights which I was unable to reach, any more than I could marry a man whose mental level I could easily surmount. Not so, sir. If I go to Newnham it is that I may make myself worthy of one who is to become a great man—a very

great man. Let me be a very great woman, if he is to take my hand. Write me long letters—quite long letters—if you can spare the time, all about yourself. Good-bye, you dear old George.

‘ Affectionately,
‘ ELINOR.’

A very pretty letter. It went straight to the young man’s heart. His eyes softened as he read it.

‘ Newnham, Nellie! We shall be undergraduates together. But I am afraid they won’t let me ask you to dine in Hall. . . .’

Not much love in the letter, but enough. When young people have known each other so long—namely, from childhood—and have dropped into an understood engagement, almost without a word spoken, at nineteen and sixteen, it would be absurd to think of raptures and darts and flames. A calm and steady flame, at best, was the love of these two young people for each other.

‘ Newnham! Nell at Newnham! I wonder how often I shall be able to see her?’ George put the letter in his pocket. ‘ Nell a First Class in the Classical Tripos! Well, why not Nell, as well as any other?’

He put out the candles and went into his bedroom. There a strange disquiet seized him: his heart began to beat; he shivered; he thought he must have taken cold. He hastened to seek the friendly embrace of the blankets.

Now, if he had known what was going to happen, he would have sat up to wait for it. He would have met that thing broad awake, with a stout heart and an iron will. If he had understood the fluttering of his heart and the vague disquiet which filled his soul, he would have known that these things were caused by a benevolent fairy, incapable of doing more than pluck at his sleeve and whisper in his ear and warn him—though by signs that he did not understand—not to go to bed that night at all.

Because, you see, on his pillow, waiting till he should be asleep, when he could whisper evil things, and fill him with abominable purposes and horrid temptations, sat a Devil. George did not know this, unfortunately, and so lay down, closed his eyes, and in a few minutes fell fast asleep.

He slept for two hours. Then, suddenly, he started

violently. He heard, as one sometimes does in dreams, his own name called loudly. He sat up in bed and listened. No, it was only a dream.

He was about to lie down again, still half asleep, when he became aware of a most singular feeling in the throat. It was dry and parched: it grew drier, more parched, every moment: it seemed to be on fire: quickly, in a few moments, the dry throat became like a red-hot furnace, and there fell upon him a necessity to drink, just as one must pour water upon flames. He sprang out of bed and seized the carafe. But he put it down without drinking any of the water. It was not water he wanted. Not all the water in the Nile would assuage that raging thirst or put out that fire. He rushed into the other room. On the table stood that bottle of whisky newly opened for the man who had taken a little. He seized a tumbler and half filled it with spirit: then he filled up the glass with water, and drank it at one breath. Oh, the sweetness and the refreshment of that draught! He took another and another, with deep-drawn sighs of satisfaction. Not Tantalus himself, when the water ceased to avoid his lips, drank with greater rapture or more greediness.

It was over. He wondered what it meant. What had he done to cause this sudden and horrible thirst—this raging fire in his throat? He sighed again. It was over. Would it come again?

He went back to his bedroom: but he took the bottle with him; and he sat on the bed, trying to understand the thing. Such a consuming thirst he had never before experienced—not even after the first row over the course—not even when climbing painfully up the slopes of Snowdon—never had he felt, never had he conceived the idea of such a frightful, appalling, overwhelming thirst.

No man in the world had ever been more temperate than George Atheling—not more abstemious, because he always took his pint of beer with his lunch and his claret with his dinner, like any other man. But not the least breath of suspicion had ever rested upon him in the matter of temperance. Whisky and potash were to be had in his rooms by those who chose; he never did. Punch and toddy are now as extinct as saloop and purl; but the whisky and potash remains.

George, however, never drank this compound. Up to this moment his head had never felt the potency of drink, nor had his mind ever understood how men can crave for ardent liquor. Never—never—never.

Therefore the thing must clearly have been by the instigation of the Devil.

While he sat upon his bed the fiery thirst assailed him a second time. It was a flaming, roaring, raging, consuming, devouring thirst. He was all throat—burning, scorching throat. The thirst compelled him—forced him—drove him—to drink again. He drank plain whisky, whisky and water, plain whisky again. At last he seemed to have subdued the thing; but he had nearly finished the bottle.

He lay back wondering stupidly what it meant, and what illness was about to follow. Again—a third time—the fire broke out again. He drank up the rest of the bottle, dropped it from his hand on the floor, and fell back, asleep. The whole business had hardly lasted five minutes. Perhaps he had never been fully awake at all.

At seven o'clock his gyp looked in to call him. He found his master lying on his back breathing heavily, his face flushed. At the bedside, on the floor, lay the empty bottle.

'Good Lord!' said the man, 'I opened it last night at nine o'clock, and none of the gentlemen drank it. He's finished the whole bottle. Mr. Atheling! who'd ha' thought it? Here, wake up, sir—wake up! Mr. Atheling—of all the gentlemen in the College!'

He could not wake him up. He therefore desisted.

The gyp—by name Mavis—was a man about five-and-forty. He belonged to the College; his father had been a gyp before him, and his mother was a bedmaker; he had never dreamed of anything better for him than the post he held. He had now been a gyp for twenty-five years; that is, for eight generations of undergraduates. He was a man whom some men loathed, and others regarded as the best servant in the world. He was always respectful, always noiseless, always perfect in his work. Yet some men loathed him; they spoke of worms, reptiles, and things that crawl, when his name was mentioned. His eyes were always downcast, and his face, clean shaven, was always pale.

The gyp, therefore, finding that he could not wake up his master, took away the whisky-bottle, left him, and went about his work.

At nine, at ten, and at eleven he looked into the room again. At last he found Mr. Atheling sitting in the bed, half-dressed.

'Whatever is the matter, sir?' asked the man. 'What in the world——'

'I've got a splitting headache——'

'Well, sir, you'll excuse me, but if you drink a whole bottle of whisky at night, what can you expect but a head like a lump o' lead? I wonder you're alive, sir, that I do. A whole bottle!'

A whole bottle! George started, remembering suddenly what had happened.

'Mavis,' he said, 'something very strange has happened to me. I got up in the middle of the night with a raging thirst, and I began to drink. I had to drink, else I should have gone mad. Why'—his eyes rolled and his voice became thick—'I feel it again. I am going mad, I believe. My throat is on fire—it is on fire!'

He fell back upon the bed and buried his head in the pillows, with a groan.

The gyp, Mavis, had seen other young men—they are by no means so numerous as they were wont to be fifty years ago at this ancient Seat of Learning—he had seen them in the repentant morning when punishment is administered with equal hand, and when hot coppers, fiery throats, disordered stomachs, parched tongues and fevered brows are served out among young sinners. He knew the symptoms and supposed that these were no more than the effects of an ordinary case.

'What you want,' he said, 'is a small glass of stuff, neat—a hair of the dog——'

'Quick! Quick! The whisky. Bring it! Bring it!'

The gyp opened another bottle and brought it. To his amazement, his master, the most sober of young men, did not wait for a glass, but began to pour the whisky down his throat, drinking it out of the bottle.

'Good Lord!' he cried. 'Mr. Atheling, sir, consider: you'll kill yourself!'

He caught his master by the arm and tried to take the

bottle from him. George raised his fist, massive and ponderous. The gyp recoiled at the very sight of that huge weapon. He fell backwards into the tub, where he sat with eyes of terror and of amazement, regardless of the cold water, while he saw his master gasping between the drinks, with red, swollen cheeks and staring eyes.

'Good Lord!' he cried again, 'he'll kill himself!'

He got up and essayed to dry his clothes a little with the bath-towel. George went on drinking, but less greedily. The first strength of the attack was gone. Then it left him altogether and he staggered out into his keeping-room.

Breakfast was laid, but he refused to take any, throwing himself into a chair.

The gyp cleared away the things and left him, shutting the outer oak.

When he came back about five or six in the evening, he found his master lying dead drunk on the floor; and another bottle of whisky was gone.

'Now,' said Mavis, 'I wonder what's best to be done for him and for me.'

He contemplated this Fall of Man with more than common curiosity: other Adams he had seen fall in a like deplorable manner, but never such an Adam—such an unexpected Fall.

'Well,' he went on, 'nobody would have believed—nobody. The very last gentleman in the College—that's what I should ha' said. That's what the Master would ha' said. That's what the Tutor would ha' said. That's what all the gentlemen would ha' said. The very last! And such a truly determined Go! I never heard tell of such a drink before. I never see such a drink. He ought to be a dead un with all that whisky! If he hadn't been such a uncommon big man he would be a dead un, too—stiff un and dead!'

He lifted his master, with great difficulty, from the floor to the sofa; and then he left him there. But he impressed upon the bedmaker, who knew nothing about the bottles of whisky, that Mr. Atheling was ill and must not be disturbed on any account. He himself would look after him.

In the evening, at nine o'clock, the gyp came again. He

laid out a little food upon the table in case his master should awake hungry, and he left him in darkness and went away.

It was full daylight when George awoke. He sat up on the sofa and looked round him. He had fallen asleep on the sofa. He remembered nothing more. He got up, undressed, and went to bed.

In the morning his gyp found him sleeping like a child. The fever had spent itself.

Presently he arose and dressed. His hands shook, his head was aching; but he felt no more thirst.

'Mavis,' he said, 'you were here yesterday—in the morning.'

'I was, sir.'

'Tell me: did you ever—did you ever see a man in such a condition before?'

'Well, sir,' said the man, 'I have seen many a gentleman as drunk as a log; but I don't think I ever see any gentleman so fierce with it as you were yesterday morning. Lord! It seemed as if you couldn't get the drink down fast enough!'

'I could not, indeed. You have exactly described it.'

'Three bottles of whisky gone since Tuesday night, and now it's Thursday. There's many a poor fellow as gets the Horrors on a good deal less than that. Three bottles of whisky in one night and a day! Because last night you didn't drink anything.'

'Mavis, who saw me besides yourself?'

'No one saw you. No one, sir. I took good care of that. I took away the bottles and told Mrs. Grip'—she was the bedmaker—'that you were ill and not to be disturbed. She suspects nothing. If she did, it would be all over the College by this time. No, sir; I know my duty to the gentlemen of the College, I hope. Your oak was sported and you were not at home to anybody—not even to the Master, if he'd been taking a walk this way.'

George breathed more freely. It is bad to be at the mercy of a servant; but even that is better than to have your shame proclaimed all over the place, though you must— He drew his purse from his pocket. There was in it a ten-pound note and some money. He took out the note and gave it to the gyp—thus the Britons bought out the Saxons, and the Saxons bought out the Danes.

'This,' he said, 'is for yesterday, for to-day and for to-morrow and ever afterwards.'

'You're very kind, sir, I'm sure. I wasn't thinking of that.' Mavis pocketed the present with a smile of satisfaction which could not be restrained. 'Of course, sir, no one shall know. And if at any future time——'

'Silence!' cried George, with gathering wrath. 'There can be no future time. It is impossible!'

He marched into his keeping-room, being now fully dressed.

Mavis pulled out the note and looked at it. Yes—his eyes had not deceived him. It was a tenner.

'Lord!' he said. 'Here's luck! And it's only a beginning. He's sure to do it again. They always do. Pity! Pity! He's at the end of his second year a'ready. Ah! what I might have made out of him by this time—if he'd only begun when he was a freshman!'

CHAPTER II.

HOW THE THING WAS RECEIVED.

GEORGE swallowed some breakfast. Then, reflecting that the men were all at lecture and that nobody would meet him, he took his hat and walked out of College. He wanted to be alone all day in order to think about it—to put the thing clearly to himself. In order to be alone he must walk out of the College and out of the town.

He took the road before him—that which leads to Madingley—and tramped resolutely along the broad flat way which stretches across the broad flat country.

For the first time in his life he was humiliated. Worse than humiliation had fallen upon him: a profound abasement—a feeling of degradation. He was hurled from his heights of self-respect. 'I am a hog! I am a hog!' he said a thousand times. 'I made no resistance; I drank because I was thirsty. What became of my strength? Where was my will? Where was my self-respect? All—all—vanished in a moment. Why did this thing fall upon me? How was it caused?' With other questions rising naturally out of the situation, just as an examination-paper

rises naturally out of the Peloponnesian War. Only, had he attempted to pass this examination, to answer these questions, he would have been most certainly and surely plucked, because he had no answer to any single one.

How did it happen? Why, it is a thing incredible. Who could expect it? That a young man of strictly temperate habits should thus suddenly become a drunkard—that he should drink for two days and more without stopping . . . who could believe it? There is a well-known story of a monk who, for some reason, was condemned to commit one of the deadly sins. He chose drunkenness as the least deadly—if there is any difference in the deadliness of sins. When he recovered, he found that he had committed all the rest. George Atheling was like that monk in one respect—namely, that he had actually done the thing which he had always held in the greatest loathing and contempt. Like the late Duke of Sussex, he had always been inclined, on hearing the commandment, 'Thou shalt not get drunk,' to murmur, instead of the form appointed, the words, 'Never did that; never did that.' The commandment forbade a thing which was impossible to him. It was meant for other people. And he had done it: he was that miserable, cowardly creature—a drunkard!

He walked hard: he grew hot: he grew thirsty. A dreadful fear fell upon him that this might prove a return of the former thirst insatiable. He stopped at a little village shop where they kept gingerbeer, and ordered a bottle of this delectable compound with horrid forebodings.

Nothing followed. His thirst was only the result of fatigue and exercise, coupled with the natural effects of this orgie. He drank his gingerbeer, and felt relieved. Presently, he turned and walked back. When he reached the College he was so much better that he was encouraged to venture into Hall, where he accounted for his absence the day before by a little evasion—one of that kind not put down by the recording angel. He said he had had a touch of sore throat, which was perfectly true. He was looking ill, they told him. What he felt was that he might, at any moment, be seized at the throat by this Devil of a thirst and betray himself. Fortunately, this did not happen.

He retreated, after Hall, to his own rooms, afraid to trust himself any longer among his friends. He went

to bed early, not so much because he was tired, but because he was anxious. He went to bed with a dreadful fear of what might happen. He woke at three, expectant. Nothing at all happened. He had no desire for drink. The thought of drinking whisky at that hour filled him with loathing. He laid his head upon the pillow, and fell asleep again. In the morning, he awoke perfectly recovered. He got up early, took a header in the College bath and a run round Parker's Piece before breakfast. He was himself again. Nay, though he thought of the thing with horror, it was principally because he had made so shameful a surrender. Should it ever come upon him again, he would fight it down. Certainly, he would fight it down. But, perhaps it would not come any more.

Mavis, for his part, regarded his master with a greatly increased interest. And he took care, being a thoughtful gyp, and knowing what was due to his gentlemen, that there should be, ready to hand, at least one bottle of ardent spirits to carry his master along, in case he should again be visited by that consuming thirst. It will be observed that Mavis belonged naturally to the tribe of those who live by providing for the vice of others. Mavis was disappointed. The time went on, and there was no second attack. He watched his master closely. He drank next to nothing. He trained and rowed in the College boat; he read in the mornings, and in the evenings went about among the other men exactly as before. It seemed as if he had forgotten that night and day. George had not forgotten it. Such a thing is not so readily forgotten; he had yielded, cowardly. Such a thing as a disgraceful surrender is not easily forgotten. But he had been taken unawares. If it should fall upon him a second time, he should know how to fight it. He had been attacked suddenly, and in his sleep; he was half asleep. Next time, should there ever happen a next time, he would meet it as a man should.

Other things happened which prevented him from forgetting it. A man in the College—a man with whom George would not consort, a man of low and vicious habits—was known to be suffering from delirium tremens. This made the men talk of drink, and deepened George's abhorrence of the pit into which he had fallen. There were

articles and letters also going on at the time in the papers on the Great Temperance Question. These he read with a sense of guilt and shame. And one evening a thing was said which gave him food for much reflection.

It was in a small company of talk in the evening. They were talking at large, encyclopædically, as young men delight to talk. Every clever young man would be Doctor Universalis—possessor of all the knowledge there is. For the moment they talked of heredity.

‘Everything is hereditary,’ said one of them who was going in for science, and, therefore, had a right to pronounce. ‘We inherit everything—our virtues and our vices, our strength and our weakness—from our forefathers.’

‘According to that,’ said another, ‘no man can be praised or blamed.’

‘Not for his virtues or his vices, but for the extent to which he carries them. When a child is born, we ought to be able to predict for him all the forces which are latent in his brain and are going to grow up with him. One grandfather was penurious, or one was extravagant; one was rash, or one was timid; and so on. Unfortunately, we keep no record of our grandfathers and their peculiarities. If we were to begin to do this, it would be the better for our grandchildren. I take it that inherited tendencies may be strengthened or weakened according to the action of any generation. If the worst man in the whole world could realize the miseries his way of life was transmitting to his children, he would instantly become virtuous.’

‘Well, but we inherit all the virtues that there are, as well as all the vices. And we inherit all the diseases that there are as well.’

‘As for the diseases, each generation gets, happily, only a part. Asthma goes to one, and gout to another. I suppose it is the same with the virtues and the vices. We haven’t time, in seventy years, to work through the whole of our inheritance. Methuselah is the only man who really did that. Things seem capricious only because we have not found out a Law of Heredity. Take the most hereditary thing of all, for instance—drunkenness.’

‘Drunkenness hereditary?’

‘Why, of course it is. As hereditary as gout. In a large

family it will attack one and spare all the rest. Or it will jump over a whole generation, and break out in the next.'

George heard no more. For now he remembered a little episode in his own family history—a thing he had heard once, and had long since forgotten. His own grandfather—his mother's father—had, to use a familiar expression, drunk himself to death. He remembered plainly hearing that fact stated somewhere—drunk himself to death. How, he wondered, philologically, can a man drink himself? Why, if every draught accelerates his end, the liquor may, by a figure of speech, stand for the breath of life. He drinks himself up.

Who told him this? Not his mother, certainly. Yet he knew it. He had heard it. His grandfather died quite young—under thirty. He drank himself to death. So this, then, was part of his inheritance. His friends talked he sat silent, resolving to meet this danger with a strong will and the courage of a valiant heart. He longed for the occasion to arrive. The sooner it came the better. Since the battle had to be fought out, let it be fought speedily while he was at his strongest and best.

The occasion lingered. The term passed by without any further trouble.

On the last day of term most of the men went down. It suited his arrangements to stay up for one day longer. He had almost ceased to fear the Thing. He was so sure of his power to meet it, when it came, that he tried to trouble himself no more about it. To be sure he had yielded shamefully. But then he was taken unawares. The next time——

He sat reading in his room until midnight. Then he went to bed and fell asleep.

Early in the morning, before daybreak, he awoke with a start. The horrible thirst was upon him a second time; the fire in his throat, the craving—irresistible, vehement—for strong drink had seized him again.

He made no resistance; he attempted none: it seemed impossible for him to think of resistance: he never thought of resisting. He rushed into the other room.

There was no whisky. He found a bottle of brandy, and drank that. When it was finished, he hurled himself upon the bottles of sherry as Ajax threw himself upon the inno-

cent sheep, and made dead men of every one till he rolled over and became an unconscious log.

Three days later, pale and haggard, knocked to pieces by an orgie far longer, far worse than the first—an orgie which terrified the gyp, and almost drove him to reveal what was going on to the tutor—George went down. Mavis, after he had carried his master's portmanteau to the College gates, went back to his staircase, and sat on the stairs smiling with satisfaction. In his pocket was another ten-pound note. Very few College gyps, he reflected, even when they've got a young nobleman on their stairs, had made a better term of it than he had done.

George went down, wrecked in mind more than in body. For a man may fail once and yet retrieve his good name. Regiments have been known to run away from the enemy one day and to defeat them the next. But George failed twice, and the second failure was far worse than the first.

He fell into despair. He could no longer associate with other men. He must leave the University. He wrote at once to take his name off the College books without assigning any reason.

'Pity he is so rich,' said the tutor. 'I hoped that he would have gone on as he began, without the ordinary stimulus of necessity. Nobody ought to be allowed to be rich till he is fifty at least.'

He was himself doing extremely well, and he was forty-nine.

The tutor was wrong. It was not his big income which made him lazy; it was this truly awful Thing that had fallen upon him. This it was that made him afraid and ashamed to return among his old friends. Sooner or later they would find him out.

Once—twice—in Cambridge. A month later—in London, and never any resistance at all. Never the least power of resistance. As soon as the fiery furnace began to burn in his throat, he rushed to the bottles and drank—drank—drank—mad—mad to extinguish the flames.

All that summer he stayed in London. He would not trust himself to see his *fiancée*, Elinor Thanet. He wrote making excuses. He was afraid to face her.

Then a great dread fell upon him that he might somehow be attacked without the means of allaying the Thing. He

thought he must have with him always a confidential servant who would know what to do. There was the man Mavis. He did not like the man much ; but he was a good servant, and he knew the truth. Perhaps he would give up the College. He telegraphed to Mavis.

Mavis came. He was willing to leave the College if it was made worth his while. He was more than willing to act as the keeper of a gentleman who wanted somebody to look after him. Mavis proved a person of great resource : he did not propose resistance or any other impossibilities : he accepted the facts of the case : he looked for, and found, to begin with, a cottage at a convenient distance from town and quite in the country. On three occasions, between the months of June and the end of September, he took his master down to this retreat. He also took with him a large hamper containing ardent drinks of various kinds.

In the intervals between these visits, George found himself perfectly, absolutely free from the desire for drink. He loathed the sight of whisky : he became almost a total abstainer. In other respects, he was the same as before : perfectly strong and healthy both in mind and body. But when the attack began he made no more attempt at resistance than a man with neuralgia does to persuade himself that there is no pain anywhere.

He fell into a profound melancholy. He now fully understood that the same disease which had killed his grandfather had fallen upon himself. His career was stopped at the outset : there would be no career possible for him. How can a man do anything who has to go away into hiding every month or so, while the Devil forces him to make a hog of himself ?

When the men came back to College in October it was reported that Mavis, the gyp, had resigned. It was also said that Atheling had taken his name off the books. Atheling ? What on earth did he do that for ? Atheling ? Of all the men in the College, the last they would let go. Atheling ? What did it mean ? Despondency fell upon the whole College, insomuch that the freshmen were awed and hushed, and in Hall there was no laughter, and in the rooms there were no stories told ; and the College boat, for want of their old number five, began, like Noah's Ark, to creep slowly upon the face of the waters.

George's rooms were taken by a freshman named John-Carew, a youth of promise who had obtained the first entrance scholarship, brought up a scholarship from St. Paul's, and was expected to become a Bell Scholar.

This young man took over the furniture of his predecessor at a valuation. One morning, while he was searching in a drawer of his writing-table, he came upon a layer of old stationery. Among the envelopes was a cabinet photograph representing the face of a very good-looking young man indeed.

'What is this?' said Carew, showing it to a man in the room at the time. He was a third year man.

'Why,' said he, 'it is a portrait of Atheling, who was going to do such great things—only they have not come off. No one knows why he went down or where he is now. *Cherchez la femme*, perhaps,' added the philosopher of twenty-two.

'Anyhow,' said Carew, 'he had a good face—an admirable face. One would not readily forget such a face as that. I wish I had known him. A face that one could not forget if one tried.'

CHAPTER III.

OF THE FALLING OUT.

'So, sir,' said Elinor, stepping across the lawn to meet her lover, 'you have come at last.'

It was a warm and sunny afternoon towards the end of September. A broad lawn stretched in front of a goodly country house, modern, perhaps too new; but the Thanets are new people, as everybody knows. Yet not so very new; and their novelty is gilded. Not people of to-day, but of yesterday, or even the day before yesterday.

It matters very little in these days how the money is made; but it may be mentioned, as a detail, that the Thanet money was made by Elinor's grandfather in the good old days of railway making, when the founder of the family engineered, contracted, and constructed on the largest scale possible, with results of a most satisfactory kind.

Elinor herself, an only child, might, judging from her

appearance, have been the daughter of a hundred belted earls; but then our English girls, when they have got the wherewithal, do in the second generation easily assume the aristocratic manner and appearance. She was still quite young, not more than eighteen; more womanly in figure than most girls of that age, and rather more serious in countenance. This was, perhaps, due to her difficulties with Latin prose, which still continued to give her anxiety. It might also be partly caused by the neglect of her lover, who had not been to see her all the summer.

'You have treated me so abominably, sir,' she said, giving him both her hands, 'that I had almost made up my mind——'

'I am so very sorry, Nell. I could not possibly come before. I have been kept in town by all kinds of business, and——'

'Oh! business, indeed!' she laughed, incredulous. 'You know, George, you have never had any business in your life. First, I thought you were going up for the Long; then you said you were going to France or somewhere; then I had that strange letter from you.'

'Forget that letter, Nell. I was ill when I wrote it.'

'I have forgotten it, because you would not have written it if you had been well. I tore it up. But, George, you must have been very ill to write such a strange, rambling letter, all about heredity, and duty to posterity, and I know not what.'

'I had a feverish cold which made me light-headed for a few hours. Forget that letter, Nelly. I wrote it when I was only half myself, and full of queer fancies.'

'Oh, it is nothing. It is forgotten. Let me look at you. George, you don't look at all well—whatever is the matter with you?'

'Nothing, Nell. Nothing at all. What should there be?'

'Your face looks—what shall I say?—puffy, and your eyes look anxious. What has happened?' she asked earnestly.

'Nothing has happened, Nell, except that I was certainly ill for a few days. What should have happened?'

She shook her head.

'Something,' she said. 'Why, I found out from your

letters that something was wrong. There has been—I don't know—a discordant note in them for two or three months. Well, you will tell me—won't you, George?—if there is any trouble? How can we be happy together unless we share all our troubles, whatever they may be?

'Yes, Nell, yes—you are quite right. I will take all your troubles on my own back, and you shall have no part of mine. Come, that is my idea of fair division.'

She shook her head. That would not do.

'Well, then,' said George, 'let us talk about something else—about you, for instance. Tell me all that you are doing. Who is here, to begin with?'

George kept the talk on things indifferent until it was time to dress.

'I must tell her,' he murmured during that ceremony. 'I must tell her something—enough. This is to be my last visit. I will tell her to-morrow morning.'

'Mamma dear,' said Elinor, on her way to dress, 'there is something wrong with George.'

'What should there be?'

'I do not know. Something there is. Watch him during dinner.'

No one else observed any change in him. Mr. Thanet congratulated him on looking so well. A certain learned physician, who was of the company and an old friend, told him that he ought to be the happiest man in the world: meaning, because he was young, strong and lusty, rich, and happy in his love.

Those who were not old friends regarded with admiration this magnificent specimen of humanity. If they were ladies, they envied the lot of Elinor; and if they were men, they envied the lot of the man himself. Fortunate in love; fortunate in gifts and graces; fortunate in birth, wealth, and understanding: what more could Nature give him? She had given him, in addition to these inherited qualities, a grandfather who drank himself to death.

George had little conversation with Elinor during the dinner. She observed that his hand shook a great deal: at this she marvelled. And she observed that he drank no wine, a thing which now causes no astonishment. He must have been very ill, she thought, when he wrote that letter.

That illness had not completely left him yet. It altered the tone of his letters : it altered the look in his eyes.

'My dear,' said her mother, after dinner, 'you are too anxious about George : he seems to me very well.'

'No; he is not well. He is fidgety and nervous. I dare say he will tell me about it to-morrow.'

George passed a most uncomfortable night. This was inevitable, because he knew that certain things must be said in the morning : certain things must be told which would not be well received. He was not going to tell all the things which had happened—not all. He could not go to the girl and say :

'Nelly, the man you love is afflicted with a dire and dreadful disease. He is assailed by a fiend who brings him a bottle and commands him to drink. He is so weak and cowardly that he has yielded to this Devil without the least resistance. He has never resisted him at all. He has never even attempted to resist him. He has been prevented from coming here all the summer by one attack after the other. He is only here at great risk of being found out, and between his attacks. He has a man-servant whose chief duty it is to watch for the approach of the next attack, and to take care of him while it lasts. In plain language, your lover has become a confirmed drunkard in the short space of three months !'

Could he say all this to the girl ? Could he write this to her ? Could he even say this to himself in so many words ?

In the morning he declined to join the shooting-party, and remained at home in order to tell as much as he dared—as much, in fact, as would put an end to his engagement. He was going to commit a kind of suicide. Heavens ! If anyone had told him six months ago that he would of his own accord try to find out words strong enough and cruel enough to break off his engagement !

'Come into the library, George,' said Elinor ; 'you have something to tell me. We can talk quite freely now.'

This was her own study. A table in one of the windows was covered with her books and papers. She sat down in her own arm-chair before the table.

'I am getting on very well, George. My coach is quite satisfied with me.'

'I am very glad, if it pleases you, Nell. What I have to tell you will not please you so much, I think.'

He turned his head, afraid to meet her eyes.

'What is it?'

He went to the open window and looked out.

'Only that we shall not be undergraduates together, after all.'

'George!' She sprang to her feet. 'Not undergraduates together!'

'I have made up my mind, in fact, that I would give up reading for Honours. I think the time may be more profitably employed.'

'In what way? Why, you have always believed that a First Class in Honours is the best start a man can possibly make!'

'I certainly used to hold that belief: I do so no longer. If you consider our statesmen,' he said grandly, 'our leading statesmen, you will observe that hardly any of them have got a First Class. Now, I think that the study of politics, history, perhaps modern languages——'

'But, George, that is quite a new departure!'

'Quite a new departure. And, in short, I have already taken my name off the College books. I am not going back to Cambridge at all.'

'Oh! but this is terrible! I cannot understand it. Oh! George, I am so sorry—I am so very sorry!'

The tears came into her eyes as she spoke.

'It is done now,' he replied doggedly.

'But I don't understand it,' she said. 'What does it mean? When I saw you last—in May was it? or in April?—not since then—a long while ago—you were full of your work and of College matters. You were resolved on getting into the First Class. Nothing at all has happened since. Yes, George'—she laid her hand upon his arms—'something has happened. You are ill—you wrote an incoherent letter. Has that illness anything to do with it? Are you still suffering from its effects? You are not yourself—your hand shakes—your eyes are anxious—and they are cold,' she added.

'Nothing at all has happened, Nell. As for my illness—that was nothing.'

'Do you remember, George, years ago when you were a

boy and you wanted to hide from me that ugly cut in your left arm, how you persisted in saying that nothing had happened—till the blood ran down? Now, George, no more fibs and fictions. Tell me, straight, what has come over you?

‘There is nothing to tell, I assure you.’

‘Why, your looks belie you. Your eyes are guilty. Come, tell me what it is. Have you done anything foolish? Any young man might, though you would be the last. I have heard of men being rusticated for foolish things—making bonfires or something; but you could not possibly go making bonfires.’

‘No; I have not been rusticated. I simply got tired of reading. What is the good of a First Class to me? To some poor devil who has got his way to make in the world, I dare say it helps more than a bit. But to me—’

‘To you? Why, of all men in the world, George, you have got your own way to make. What signifies money? You may use your wealth as one means—but the least worthy—of making your way. Where are your ambitions?’

‘I think—they are all gone, Nell,’ he replied, trying to speak and look cheerfully. ‘They are all gone into the limbo of forgotten resolutions. I have ceased to think in the old way.’

‘Gone? Your ambitions gone? Why, they are a part and parcel of yourself! You have always taught me so. Without ambition, what is life? Who would desire to live from day to day without work and without hope? They are your own words, George. You have said them a thousand times. And now you tell me that you are changed.’

‘Yes; I am changed.’

‘Changed—in everything, George?’

He hesitated. He made no reply.

‘If you are so much changed,’ she went on, ‘where is the George to whom I am engaged?’

He hesitated still. Then he said, slowly and painfully:

‘I am quite changed. That is true. I don’t seem, somehow, to care so much for the career which you and I have so often sketched out and dreamed over. That is the change in me. I have had enough of the University. It is only a continuation of school, after all. Let me be my own master. I dare say that the old ambitions will return. It is, as you

say—well then, as I used to say—rather a pity to sit down and do nothing all your life. It is like creating a new vice to be handed down to your children. Everything that we do or suffer, you know, is handed down to our children. We may make them gouty, or rheumatic, or consumptive: we may make them lazy or industrious: we may make them drunkards if we choose——’

‘Well, yes, we can do all these fine things, I dare say. You said something like this in your mad letter. But, my dear George, some ancestor of yours must have been a preacher of moral commonplace, and you have only just found it out. Seriously, what does it all mean? Why do you go off on heredity? That has nothing to do with the loss of your ambitions and the surrender of your career.’

‘You will agree with me,’ he went on, speaking in a constrained and harsh voice, ‘when you think things over. We will give up all the foolish ambitions, and let the world take care of itself. What is the world to us? What has the world done for us? Why should we do anything for the world?’

Yet a faltering in his voice. It was as if the new man had no belief in himself. Strange! What had come over George? The girl was bewildered.

‘I do not understand,’ she said again.

‘Give up your own idle dreams, Nell. What does it matter whether you get a First Class or not? Think no more about these trifles. Let us enjoy the world. We are young. The world belongs to the rich and to the young. Let us enjoy the world.’

Again it was as if he did not believe his own words. There was no ring of conviction in them. George was quite—quite changed. At any rate, whatever he used to say, he used to believe. The girl blushed a rosy red. It was because she was forming a most portentous resolution.

‘If you have abandoned your ambitions,’ she said slowly, ‘you have abandoned yourself. You tell me that nothing has happened. Why, I have lost my old friend—my old companion—my’—her voice shook—‘my lover!’

‘No, Nelly; not that.’

Again no sincerity. His face was unmoved. Nay, she even thought that there was a look of relief in his eyes, as if he was actually pleased at his own dismissal.

'He is gone,' she went on. 'Well, when he returns to himself, he will, perhaps, come to see me again. Till then I do not desire to see him, or any substitute of him, or any person parading under his name. Do you understand—Pretender?'

'I believe I understand.'

'Tell the real George that I am still his. I belong to him, whether he returns or whether he does not, until he himself sends me a release.'

'May not I give you release?'

'Certainly not, sir! You are not George Atheling. I must hear it from my old companion—from my lover—from himself.'

She turned and walked out of the library with a dignity beyond her years. George made no effort, even by gesture or by word, to stop her.

'It was inevitable,' he said when the door closed behind her. 'It was inevitable.' He sighed—unmanly tears filled his eyes. 'I had to do it. I have been cruel—cold—lying—but it had to be done. I am a brute and a cad—but it was forced upon me. Poor child! It is a dreadful blow to her. But it had to be done some time. The sooner the better. She is only eighteen, and she will get over it—in time. She will forget me, and fall in love with——' He stamped his foot, and cursed that unknown lover of his imagination. 'Well, all is gone now—freedom, honour, ambition, love—nothing left but money to buy the stuff that is killing me and strength to prolong the agony—unless I end it—yes, yes—end it on the Voluntary Principle.'

He went out and sought the Post-office, whence he despatched a telegram to his servant—the faithful Mavis.

At luncheon time—Elinor had a headache and remained in her own room—a telegram arrived for Mr. Atheling.

'Fortunate,' he said, 'that I was not out shooting. This telegram calls me back. I must return to London immediately.'

'Immediately?' asked Mrs. Thanet. 'But you will come back as soon as you can?'

'As soon as I can,' George repeated mechanically. 'And now I have only just time to catch the half-past two train if I go at once.'

Upstairs Elinor sat alone, as miserable as a girl under

these sad circumstances can expect to be. She had lost her lover and her old familiar friend.

She was a clear-headed girl, and under no illusions. She perceived that for some reason or other he wished to break off the engagement. His words, his looks, his manner, all showed that he desired to be free. Well, she had set him free. She expected now that he would write her a letter of release.

She told her mother that George had altered his views of life, and that in a way so important that for the present there must be no further talk about him. Meantime, she said that, unless George released her, she was still bound to him. And, as I said above, she was as miserable as a girl under such sad circumstances can expect to be. But the Latin prose, which she still continued, diverted her thoughts, and the near prospect of Newnham sustained her. She needed both support and diversion, because George made no sign and sent her no release.

CHAPTER IV.

OF THE PHYSICIAN.

'Yes,' said the Physician—the idiomatic 'yes,' which does not mean assent, or promise, or anything of that kind, but encourages the other man to continue.

The other man was George. He was doing what he ought to have done at the very outset—consulting a man of science, a specialist in nervous disorders.

'Well, I have come to tell you the facts—in confidence.'

'Go on, young gentleman. Again let us hear the facts. You are suffering from drink-craving, I gather.'

George narrated the facts of the case. Let us do him so much justice. He told everything, exactly. He concealed nothing: not his own cowardly want of will: not his reliance on the secrecy of his servant: nothing. He sat in the chair of suspense, the chair of anxiety, the chair of the Patient: he made plenary confession.

'You have now told me everything?' said the Physician.

'Everything. Can you give me any hope?'

The Physician was old. He looked with pity on this young man.

'There is always,' he said benevolently, 'hope—for the patient.'

'Not always, I suppose, for the Physician?'

'For the Physician,' the man of science repeated, 'not always. For the patient, always. Hope, young gentleman, is a great medicine.'

'Tell me the worst, Doctor.'

The patient was at his lowest point of despondency. He reached, as you will hear, a lower point of submission, but never a lower point of despondency. It was after his interview with Elinor. He had begun to realize the dreariness of life when there is nothing to work for, nothing to hope. What is the use of reading or work of any kind, when one has been ordered at the age of twenty-one to retire into obscurity, sit down, and take no more part in anything?

'The worst? You know it. As for hope, it depends upon yourself. Your case is serious; yet you are young, and you should be brave. It has gone on for some time, and has assumed already an apparent mastery. Yet, again, you are young, and you should be courageous. It is an hereditary *vitium*—your grandfather, you tell me—and it certainly broke out without the least warning, just as one observes in asthma and other nervous disorders. It is a very hereditary thing. Yes, you are seized with an irresistible craving for drink.'

'Irresistible as the flood of Niagara.'

'You seem to have no power of resistance. You are driven like a sheep——'

'Like a silly sheep.'

'You fall to drinking furiously, vehemently. You drink enormous quantities of the strongest spirits: you drink enough to kill you at ordinary times. In a day or two the fit passes. Yes. . . . All this time your will is paralyzed.'

'The mind refuses to work. It is Possession.'

'Call it so, if you please.'

'I cannot think, but the brain goes on working of its own accord. I think a madman's brain may work in the same manner.'

'Undoubtedly.'

'It presents me with a never-ending procession of goblins:

images dance and caper—anything but walk—before my eyes: they are creatures that have no shape or form that one ever saw: they have heads of animals: they have human faces which mock and jeer: they have eyes which threaten and haunt. I hear voices in unknown tongues, but they are hostile voices. Doctor, I cannot explain to you half the horrors which attend the close of one of these attacks.'

'The common sort call them, simply, the Horrors.'

'Between the attacks, as at this moment, I feel no desire for drink at all. I loathe it for the memory of these sufferings. When the attack begins the loathing is turned into craving.'

'You can always keep a fire alight by feeding it.'

'I think of nothing but to satisfy the craving.'

'Have your friends advised you?'

'No one knows anything about it; no one suspects. I have left Cambridge in order not to be found out. My gyp, who knows, I first silenced by a bribe, and have since taken into my service. He never leaves me.'

'Ah!' The Physician looked dubious. 'A constant attendant is useful in certain cases. But he should be a judicious person, acting under instructions. Else——'

'I have taken chambers in town. None of my friends know my address—I go nowhere. For greater security, I have a cottage not far from London, in a lonely spot, where I take refuge whenever I have warning. My man Mavis knows the symptoms by this time. He watches for them like a cat for a mouse. At the first appearance of the symptoms, he hurries me off to my cottage. With no one else in the place except ourselves, I have it out.'

'This useful attendant takes good care that the stuff shall be in readiness, I suppose?'

'Oh yes—and plenty of it.'

'May I ask if the good man drinks with you, in a friendly way?'

George changed colour.

'On such occasions,' he said, 'what can it matter? At all other times he is a respectful and obedient servant. At the cottage he is—what you please—a brother tosspot.'

'Craving may be infectious. Young gentleman, have you never even tried to fight against it?'

'Fight against it? Why, the Thing is a Devil! Fight against it? You can't fight a Devil! When first he flew at my throat, I thought it was the Devil. Now I am certain of it. You may try to fight a Devil if you like, but he will best you, and that very soon.'

'There used to be a few old-fashioned ideas on that subject,' said the Physician, 'which I would recommend you to consider. The phraseology is antiquated, but you could perhaps clothe them anew.'

'Yes, it is easy for you to talk. One might have expected this advice. But you never had such a Devil to fight—you never had such a Devil.'

The Physician, who was old and experienced, shook his head, as one who could tell very good stories about the Devil, and of man's duels with him, on occasion and at proper times.

'I'm quite sure you never knew such a Devil. Why, this one draws and drags a man with ropes: he parches his throat, and sets it on fire: he makes him gasp and catch his breath. When he has become like one lost on a sandy desert, he gives him—the young man's face and gestures showed that it was his own experience that he was describing—he gives him—he gasped and drew a long breath—'a BOTTLE—a heavenly—ah!—beautiful—ah!—BOTTLE—filled full—it can't be too full—with brandy, whisky, anything—ah!—and he bids him drink and be happy. Fight such a Devil as that? Doctor, I don't believe that anybody ever did fight him. You know how Christian's famous fight in the valley ended—well, if Apollyon had been armed with a fiery furnace to ram down Christian's throat and a bottle to give him afterwards, Apollyon would have won. When he is away, I feel strong; I am resolved to fight him; I am quite resolute and determined. When he comes, I let my weapons fall—shield and lance and sword—I am a prisoner!'

He sank back in his chair, despairing.

'He should be exorcised by bell, book, and candle,' said the Physician. 'In the days of Faith that would have been practicable. Yes, in the old days you would have been healed by Faith.'

'Well, since I do not believe——'

'The case is less simple by reason of your unbelief. You

have no fight left in you, that is plain. Nerve and will are broken. You can make no resistance. What should have been beaten back as a suggestion of evil comes in the shape of a Lord and Master——

‘It does.’

‘Then you must find someone to fight the Devil for you. Your factotum—your brother tosspot—your boon companion—this ancient gyp—can he fight him for you?’

‘Certainly not. He is paid to keep me out of harm and beyond the reach of discovery. That is all he can do. Once he refused to bring me more. He won’t do that again.’

‘Someone else, then.’

The young man rose from his chair.

‘Look at me, Doctor,’ he said. ‘Do I look like a man easy to tackle? Remember, if anyone comes to fight the Devil for me, he will have to fight the Devil *and* me as well—both together; for the Devil is inside of me then, and I have the strength of twenty.’

You have seen that this young man was no puny creature, but quite the reverse. We are accustomed to think that persons afflicted with such a dreadful infirmity are generally wretched creatures of weak frame and feeble heads—what the London slang calls half-baked—the children of rickety parents. Physicians know better. This disease singles out the strongest and best, as well as the weakest and worst. It is as impartial as the sunshine: it is as free from favouritism as rheumatism, gout, asthma, or any other disease by which mankind is plagued because of ignorance. It drags down, slowly and swiftly, the clearest intellect: it humbles the finest scholar: it ruins the most brilliant wit: it corrupts the brain of the noblest poet: it knows no respect for crowned heads, and shows no pity for paupers. Consider this case: this splendid young man: this stalwart frame this active brain: this masterpiece of Nature. No pity: ruthless destruction of what would have been a noble life: ruin of the fairest prospects. No pity! None! And all because men are so ignorant that they cannot avert hereditary disease; so ignorant that they go on creating hereditary disease. Ignorance, my brothers, ignorance it is which fills our hospitals and our prisons; that cuts short our lives, and plagues with grievous pains and sufferings. Ignorance, nothing more!

'You look so big and strong, young man, that I cannot believe you to be such an arrant coward.'

George flushed up; but he restrained himself.

'A coward!' repeated the Physician. 'Say that to yourself every time you rush to the whisky-bottle. A coward! You do well to take your name off the College books and to break off your engagement. You are not fit to associate with gentlemen or to marry a gentlewoman!'

'It is true,' George murmured. 'It is quite true.'

'Some poor creatures, like yourself, who have not the resolution to bear any pain, however fleeting, seek refuge in an Asylum. Here they may get looked after and kept from drink. You would not. You would bribe the servants: you are too rich for the honesty of any servants.'

'I believe I am,' said George.

'There is a way of nauseating patients—putting brandy into their food.'

'I am nauseated already. I loathe the sight of spirits.'

'Or you might be subjected to hypnotic——'

'I've tried it. No mortal man can hypnotize me.'

'Then there is one chance for you—your only chance—to be placed in some position where drink is absolutely unobtainable. For instance, a temperance ship, where no drink is carried on board at all. There are such ships. You might, perhaps, take a voyage to New Zealand and back in such a ship.'

The young man shook his head.

'Consider. When the attack seized you, it would necessarily spend itself in vain, because there would be nothing to gratify and feed the craving. The second attack would be shorter, and would entail less suffering. So with the third.'

'Doctor, it would be of no use. There would certainly be drink somewhere on board, and I should get it.'

'Again, consider the plan. You are rich. You can afford to have a guardian or keeper. I will find you a young medical man who would never leave you.'

'Doctor!' The young man sprang to his feet with the appearance of tremendous resolution. 'I tell you what I will do. This will be ever so much better than going as a guarded passenger—a mark of scorn and contempt. I am rich. I will hire or buy a boat for myself, and I will sail

round the world. Not a drop of drink of any kind shall be put on board that boat. I will take your young medico with me. I will only land between the attacks when I can safely venture. Will that satisfy you ?

‘Clearly, if there is no drink to be had, it will be of no use craving for it. Well—and you will give over craving for it, if you really and honestly carry out this plan.’

‘Really and honestly, I will. I swear I will, whatever it costs me !’

‘Very good indeed. Nothing could be better. Meantime, leave that man of yours at home.’

‘I can hardly do that. Mavis is necessary to me. He knows exactly what I want—apart, I mean, from the times of——’

‘Well, if, as I say, you are strong enough to insist on there being no drink on board the ship at all——’

‘I am strong enough for that, at any rate—when the time comes. Doctor, you must let that young medical man be strong, mind—strong. For I shall have the strength of a madman !’

‘He shall be,’ said the Physician, ‘as strong as Nature and athletics can make him. But be resolute : let nothing enter the ship, neither spirits, nor wine, nor beer.’

‘Ulysses stuffed the ears of the sailors,’ said the young man thoughtfully, ‘with wax, so that they should not hear the song of the Sirens ; and then the sailors tied Ulysses to the mast—so that he heard, but could not obey. If they will tie me with iron chains to the main-mast—nothing short of iron chains will do——’

‘But there will be no drink on board. Remember that the songs of the Sirens will be only a mockery to you. They may invite you to drink, but they will give you nothing to drink.’

‘You don’t know this Devil of mine. He is sure to bring some on board ; and if it is there, I must get it somehow. Remember, Doctor, my guardian must never leave me alone. He must bind me and tie me down on deck, and set watch over me day and night. He must not trust anyone, mind—no one—not the captain, whoever he may be, nor the steward, nor my own man, even. He must never cease watching.’

‘I will give him the strictest instructions. You are right

to mistrust yourself. When will your preparations be completed ?

‘I don’t know. I dare say it will prove of no use,’ he said despondingly. ‘However, it shall be tried. Mavis, my man, shall set to work at once. Doctor, I will really try your experiment; but I doubt—I doubt. You don’t know this Devil of mine. He is the most crafty, the most subtle, the most determined Devil you ever heard of.’

He laughed, but not mirthfully.

‘He has got to do with a man who has lost his nerve and his will,’ said the Physician.

‘Find me the nerve and the will of somebody else, then. But I doubt—I doubt. My Devil is too cunning.’

CHAPTER V.

OF THE VOYAGE.

GEORGE went home. The more he thought of this projected voyage, the more it pleased his imagination. Where there was no drink to be had, there could be no craving. It would be senseless to crave for the unattainable: as well long for the luxuries of the Club from the day-room of a workhouse.

First, however, he would make that confession to Elinor. She should no longer continue to think that he had deliberately set himself to wound and pain her into sending him away.

He therefore sat down and wrote:

‘MY DEAR NELLIE,

‘You told me on Monday to return to you when I could go back in the guise and semblance of your old friend. I denied, at the time, your charge that something must have happened. I will now tell you plainly what has happened. I have become, in the short space of four months, one of those unhappy men whom I was wont to despise, called confirmed drunkards! I kept from you all the summer, hoping that the habit would pass away. It has not passed away. It is, on the contrary, stronger than ever, and now I believe that I shall be a slave for life. If

it is any excuse, I might plead that the vice is hereditary; but the Physician whom I have consulted will not allow that this is an excuse. The real fault is my own disgraceful cowardice. I went to you the other day resolved upon telling you the exact truth—I could not. Therefore I insulted and pained you beyond endurance. You said that you would continue to regard yourself as engaged to me until I gave you release. Take your release. You are free. Forget me as soon as you can. And do not blame me more than you can help.

‘I am going to try the effect of a long voyage. If that succeeds—which I doubt—I will visit you on my return as an old friend, no longer a lover. If it does not succeed, I shall never write to you or try to see you again.

‘GEORGE HUMPHREY ATHELING.’

He wrote this letter, folded it, stamped it, and left it on his table to be posted. Finding it there two or three hours later, and remembering that his servant was gone out and might be out all day, he dropped it into the breast-pocket of an overcoat. Then he forgot it. This is an accident which has happened unto many.

There it lay, in fact, while the writer of it was travelling round about the world, and for long afterwards, all unregarded and forgotten.

So that poor Elinor never got her release at all.

This done, he opened his biggest atlas at the map of the world—nothing less than that would do—and began to consider the course he should steer. There is still something exciting about a voyage round the world, though so many undertake it every year, and seem to think so little of it. It no longer takes the old-fashioned three years to accomplish the task. It may be done, I believe, in seventy days, at the rate of three hundred and forty-two and six-sevenths miles a day. But in a yacht of your own which need not race from point to point, you may still spend a good deal of time in going round the world. It would cost him a great deal, no doubt: yet, if the object was gained. . . . No drink to be got on board the ship. Splendid! Like going into action with your colours nailed to the mast: or like defending a beleagured city without so much as a white pocket-handkerchief to fly.

What kind of ship should he want? A sailing yacht for choice. But one would not wish to be becalmed in the doldrums, or to be cast away on a lee shore. An auxiliary screw, that was the thing. And when he had got a ship, he must find a Master to navigate her. How does one look for Masters? It is a very important thing to find a good Master. He must be a capable person, skilled in his calling, accustomed to command men: a sober man himself, even a total abstainer, a man of good temper, a genial man, cheerful and jocund, able to tell a good story. It would be very difficult to find such a Master. Then there was the crew. Where does one gather a crew? This must be a picked crew. Great care must be taken in finding such a crew. Again, the provisions for so long a voyage. No strong drink, of course; but every other kind of provision. There must be immense quantities of provisions for so long a voyage. Who thinks of everything? Would the ship hold all that he wanted for so long a voyage? One might as well go to the Army and Navy Stores, and order *en bloc* everything they have got in stock. Except the drink, of course. No drink on board this ship. No drink. Certainly, no drink at all.

While he was thinking of these things, his servant, Mavis, the ex-gyp, opened the door softly and came in.

'I beg your pardon, sir,' he said, standing beside his master: 'may I ask what the Doctor said?'

'Oh! is that you, Mavis? I did not hear you come in. Yes. The Doctor says that the only way out of it, is to fight the Thing.'

Mavis coughed slightly, and the ghost of a smile played upon his lips.

'To fight the Thing, Mavis!' George repeated resolutely.

'Very good, sir,' said Mavis.

'As for giving in at once, making off to your infernal cottage, surrendering without the firing of a shot, hauling down your colours—he's dead against it. Rank cowardice, that is.'

'Yes, sir.'

Mavis smiled again.

'There are two ways open to me, he says: I may go into a Home, which is always dangerous, because people may be bribed. I believe you would even climb upon the roof and

lower the bottles down the chimney, if you knew I was in trouble.'

'I would, sir,' said Mavis loyally.

'Or I might go for a long voyage on board a ship where there was no drink—not a drop of drink on board.'

'Then you would be quite safe, sir——'

'Quite safe.'

'—To go mad or throw yourself overboard.'

'Not at all, Mavis. I am going to take with me a young medical man—a strapping big fellow—to look after me. After the first attack is met, there will be less trouble, you see, with the second, still less with the third, and so on to the end.'

'Very good, sir,' said Mavis.

'Yes; I have made up my mind. I will hire a steam yacht big enough for the voyage, and I will sail all around the world—without one single drop of drink on board. You understand that, Mavis?'

'Yes, sir. Without one drop of drink on board.'

'If that won't set me right again, nothing will.'

'Nothing will,' echoed his servant.

'Very good, then. Do you go at once—as soon as you can—let us lose no time—to the shop where they keep ships on sale or hire. I suppose it is somewhere down the river. Find me one. Get a good one while you are about it. Cheaper, I should say, to hire than to buy; and less on our minds in case of her capsizing or foundering on the ocean.'

'Very good, sir. I will go this very morning.'

'Find out what the ship will cost, and—and—all about her. Be careful about her age. I know how to tell the age of a horse; but as for that of a ship, I can't advise. Take counsel. She must be big enough to cross the Atlantic—in fact, to sail all round this earthly ball. You will then find out other shops where they keep captains, stewards, ships' crews, and so forth, and learn how much it will take to engage them. You will next find out how much it will cost to victual the ship, and who undertakes this kind of business. But mind, Captain and crew must be all temperance men: there is not to be one single drop of drink, mind—not one single drop of drink put on board on any pretext whatever. You yourself have got to be a total abstainer for the whole voyage.'

'I understand, sir. No drink. Are we likely,' he asked quietly, but his master understood, 'ever to be far from the nearest port where they sell drink—in case——'

'We may be weeks from such a port.'

'Oh!' said Mavis, smiling unseen by his master.

'No drink on board,' George repeated. 'We are going on a temperance voyage. Nobody on board is to have any drink at all. Coffee instead of rum—no drink!'

Somehow, the force of his order seemed weakened by its repetition.

'Very good, sir,' said Mavis. 'As you please to direct. I beg your pardon, sir,' he added; 'but—if there is to be no drink—single-handed, I could not——'

'Didn't I tell you there will be a strong young medical man on board? Samson is his name. Long-haired Samson—Samson Armstrong, M.D. Single-handed, of course you could not tackle the case. I say, there will be a devil of a fight when the time comes, Mavis!'

'I expect there will, sir.'

'Between us we shall floor the Devil. Once he is floored—well, he is floored, I believe.'

He rubbed his hands hopefully.

'Yes, sir, so I believe,' said Mavis. 'Once floored——'

'As he must be when there is no drink. Hark ye, Mavis! There is to be a determined effort. I've got to cure myself now or never. Bring me home with a good record, and I will give you two hundred pounds. Make a note of that. Two hundred pounds! It shall be worth your while to make the job complete.'

'Thank you, sir,' said the man. 'I will do my best to make the job complete.' As he was unseen by his master, he grinned. 'Make it complete once for all,' he repeated.

He went out, and on the stairs he grinned again. 'Complete?' he repeated. 'If he is a servant now, he will be a slave before he comes back. Complete? Yes; I warrant the completeness of this job.'

Mavis was really a most excellent servant. There was nothing which he could not be trusted to carry through. He disappeared daily for a certain period of time; and in due course informed his master that he had arranged everything, subject to his approval. There was a lovely little steamer capable of riding through any conceivable seas,

almost new, proved, completely provided, and ready to take in coal at once. She was of 700 tons, and had already made two voyages.

George went down to Gravesend, where she was lying. On board he found the master mariner whom Mavis proposed to engage as Captain. A weather-beaten old salt he was, with a grizzled beard, a clear blue eye, and a face of the most resolute honesty that one had ever seen. His credentials were admirable: he had sailed over every sea, and knew every port: he was fifty-five years of age, and had been a sailor since he was ten.

'I understand, sir,' said this excellent old sea-rover, that you mean this to be a temperance ship.'

'I mean more than that. I mean that it is to be a ship without such a thing as a bottle of drink of any kind on board.'

'Very good, sir. So Mr. Mavis told me. As for shipping the drink, that's the steward's business. Mine is not to let the crew have any. For my part,' he said, looking more honest than words can express, 'I don't know the taste of rum, whisky, gin, nor beer—strong drink never passed these lips yet.'

'Indeed!' said George. 'Then, in that respect, you are the very man I want.'

Down below he found, waiting for him, the man whom Mavis proposed to engage as Head Steward, who would be Purser as well as responsible for all the ship's stores and provisions.

This officer had served in the Orient Line. Ill-health alone had caused him to leave this service. He, too, had the best of credentials. His manner was soft and sleek, rather like that of Mavis.

'A temperance voyage, I learn, sir,' he said. 'I've been a temperance man myself—a Good Templar—for twenty-five years. The crew won't expect any drink. As for yourself and your friends—'

'We are all going to be total abstainers. This is to be the first condition of engagement.'

'Very good, sir. Not a drop of drink shall come on board, except by your orders.'

All this was very satisfactory. George examined the cabins and the saloon, and went down into the engine-room.

man liable to attacks of craving for strong drink, put on board a ship where there was not a drop of strong drink—and you were to watch over him, treat him as I suggested, and guard him day and night.’

‘We were,’ said the first young man.

‘We carried out our duty to the letter,’ said the second young man. ‘Hence our great discovery, which will revolutionize—’

‘Pray go on,’ said the Physician, turning to the other man.

‘Until the first attack came on, and, indeed, between the attacks, our patient wanted no watching because he had no desire for drink at all. A better companion—a better fellow never lived. Then the first attack came.’

‘Ha! The first attack.’

‘His man knew the symptoms, and warned us of what was coming. He himself warned us. We had ample time for preparation.’

‘Very good. What did you do? Watched him closely?’

‘Yes. But first we searched him, at his own request. He was most anxious that we should be thoroughly satisfied. We searched his cabin: examined every corner of his cabin-trunk: we looked into his berth and under the berth and on the shelves. There was not so much as a bottle of eau-de-Cologne. He had secreted nothing. And there was no drink on board the ship at all. We had the cabin on either side of him, and the Captain and his own man and the steward had the three cabins opposite. I should like you to understand exactly, otherwise you would never believe what we have got to tell next.’

‘Go on! The voyage was a failure,’ the Physician groaned. ‘You have told me that. You are now going to make excuses,’ said the Physician gloomily.

‘At sunset on the day of the first attack, Mr. Atheling went into his cabin. We sat outside the open door. His man, Mavis, went in and made some simple arrangements. Then he came out. The door was locked. We watched outside.’

‘Fools! You should have watched inside. I know now what you are going to tell me.’

‘We had proved that he had no drink in the cabin: we were certain that there was none on board the ship. What

was the use? We might just as well, if that was all, have watched the case from the masthead.'

'In the morning he was drunk. You are going to tell me that!'

'In the morning he presented every appearance of intoxication. He could not be drunk, because there was no drink for him to get at.'

'He was as drunk as David's sow, I suppose.'

'Well, he looked it. What is more remarkable, he continued drunk for three days and more. We went in and out of the cabin all day: there was no drink in it. I repeat,' the young medico said earnestly, 'there could have been no drink in his cabin, just as there was none on the ship at all. None. Yet he presented every symptom of intoxication.'

'More,' said the other, 'his cabin smelt of whisky. Until we arrived at our great discovery, it was the most mysterious—the most unaccountable thing ever heard of. No one would have believed it.'

'Good Lord! What FOOLS!' said the Physician heartlessly.

'We may be fools,' replied the first young man. 'But we can at least show that we carried out our mission; and if it failed——'

'It was because there exists a Force which nobody has discovered before ourselves,' said the second young man — 'the discovery of which will make this voyage as memorable as that of the *Beagle*.'

'Good Lord!' repeated the Physician.

'There was no drink on board,' repeated the ship's Doctor.

'Rubbish!' said the Physician.

'There certainly was not. Of that we assured ourselves. The Captain swore that there was none: we searched his cabin. The steward assured us there was none: we searched his cabin. There was the official book of ship's stores to show that there was no drink on board.'

'Ha!' said the Physician, incredulous. This interjection may be made to exhibit a vast amount of suspicion.

'You do not believe. Well, we cannot help that. We had the assurance of Mr. Atheling's man, Mavis.'

'I remember. The faithful retainer who always found the drink. An excellent and most trustworthy witness!'

'At any rate, the poor man was in despair. His master had given him a promise, in writing, of two hundred pounds if the voyage should be carried out without his having any access to drink. So that he lost the money—a very considerable sum to lose!'

'I begin to understand,' said the Physician. 'Pray go on, gentlemen. Your behaviour has shown the highest intelligence. When the conjurer directs your eyes to the ceiling, you obey: while you are looking away, he does the trick. Wonderful!'

'No. In this case there was no juggling possible. The cabin-door was unlocked: we went in and out all day long. We never saw him drinking. Yet he presented every appearance of a man drinking himself almost into a comatose condition. He lay in his berth all the time: he was never quite stupefied: sometimes he recovered partially; sat up and began to sing: his eyes followed us with a kind of suspicion.'

'No doubt,' said the Physician.

'We were compelled, in short, to believe that we have discovered a new phenomenon—symptoms never before observed in such cases.'

'Really!'

'Observe, first, that on the fourth day Mr. Atheling came out of his cabin completely himself again. The sea air soon restored his shaken nerves. He became again the delightful companion, and he wanted no stimulant. Six weeks later another attack. Again the warnings, again the same precautions, again the same symptoms.' The young medicine-man looked at this point preternaturally solemn. His companion endeavoured, but with less success, to assume the same solemnity. 'In fact, after making notes and comparing our observations, we have drawn up a paper on the subject. It embodies the facts and contains our Theory.'

'Our joint Theory,' said his friend.

'Our joint Theory. We propose sending it to the *Lancet*. It is called the Unconscious Simulation of Alcoholic Symptoms.'

'Ho! ho!' laughed the Physician.

The young men looked disconcerted.

'Allow me,' said the speaker. 'We account for the phenomena by an Association of ideas, similar to those

which have produced the like results in the stories of mediæval saints.'

'Ha! ha!' The Physician laughed again.

'Allow us at least to finish. As there was no whisky to be procured, memory conjured up an exact reproduction in the mind of the processes which had previously——'

'Made him as drunk as David's sow,' said the Physician.

'Well, gentlemen, you will do what you please about your scientific paper on the Simulation of Alcoholic Symptoms. If you publish that paper, I shall have to call attention to the fact that you were sent out to watch this case, and that you allowed the patient to pass the nights, unwatched and alone, in his own cabin. That is all. Have you anything more to report to me?'

'Nothing more,' said the chief speaker, abashed.

'Except,' said the other, 'that we have had the most delightful voyage. Of course, but for this trouble.'

'I dare say,' said the Physician coldly. 'You were not, however, sent to enjoy a delightful voyage, so much as to conduct an experiment in the interests of science. And you have failed. You have been tricked and duped.'

It is the most fatal thing for a young man to fail in the first mission entrusted to him: no matter that he is not to blame—he is blamed: he never gets another mission. As for these two young gentlemen, who had made such a responsible start, they got no more chances because they had failed. Their scientific paper, which was to have made their fortune, on the Unconscious Simulation of Alcoholic Symptoms, never appeared. They parted company. One of them is now a General Practitioner in the neighbourhood of Tooley Street, Borough: he receives sixpence for every consultation, and has to give a bottle of medicine with his advice: he does pretty well, and has sometimes taken thirty or forty sixpences in a day: he is married: but he feels that even these blessings fall short of what might have come to him had that scientific paper been published. And he still watches for new illustrations of this strange and morbid trick of memory. The other is doctor on board a steamer which voyages up and down among the South Sea Islands, carrying passengers and picking up sea-slugs. And even he is not completely happy. He now regrets that they watched outside the door. Experience has taught him the crafty ways of the toper!

CHAPTER VI.

HOW THE PATIENT RETURNED.

A FEW days later the subject of this valuable scientific paper presented himself in person to the Physician.

'Humph!' he growled. 'So you've come back from your voyage.'

'As you see,' George replied, with an assumption of ease. But he had something of the appearance of the schoolboy who cannot conceal or deny the fact. 'I've come to report myself.'

'Very well. You need not trouble to report yourself, because I know already what you are going to say.'

'Well, I am come to say that, as I expected all along, the Devil proved too cunning.'

'And his victim too cowardly. Well, go on. You had an excellent chance of curing yourself of a shameful and insidious practice, and you have failed. And science has lost the record of an interesting case. You have failed. As for laying it on the back of the Devil——'

'Anyhow, Doctor, the voyage was a failure.'

'I know that already—a ridiculous failure. After the first month you ought to have come home again, for all the good it has done. You have had the pleasure of throwing away a good many thousands of pounds, and you are none the better for it; but, I am glad to tell you after such a result, very much the worse.'

'No; not worse. I think I am really better. Because, you see, now that I have made up my mind to the worst, I am no longer troubled about resistance. I am resigned. I accept the inevitable. I am not so unhappy about things as I was. Better, Doctor, not worse. Much better!'

'Humph! You are looking in very good health, at any rate. Confound you!'

'I am perfectly well. That is the strange thing, considering what I go through every two months. It has now become a recurring attack at settled periods of two months. Well, it seems to produce no bad effects upon me at all.'

His face had become broader and somewhat coarser.

Some of the finer intellectual beauty had dropped out: one cannot very well enjoy such periodical experiences and live such a life, and preserve, altogether, the spiritual look: but it was a handsome face still. Not in the least the face of an habitual drunkard. And always a good-tempered and kindly face.

'I know all about it,' said the Physician. 'You need not trouble to tell me. After a few weeks at sea the first attack came. Your medical men—the intelligent pair who were to keep you and watch you night and day—searched the cabin and yourself for drink. They found none. They left you alone all night—alone in the cabin—no suspicion of the craft and subtlety of what you call the Devil! In the morning you presented every appearance of one heavily intoxicated. You were comatose with whisky.'

'That is true,' George smiled gravely. 'That is quite true.'

'At every recurring attack the same appearances were observed, after the same elaborate precautions had been observed.'

'They were. The two young doctors have written an Essay on my case,' he laughed. 'They call it a case of Associated Alcoholism, or the Simulation——'

'I know, I know.'

'I perceive that they have called upon you. Well, you know, they are capital fellows: they play a good rubber, sing a good song, handle their singlesticks cleverly, and put on the gloves with good temper. They were never dull, and only melancholy at the first go off, when the Simulation, you know, began. They were unhappy then. Not a drop of drink in the whole ship, and yet there I was—in the cabin. They searched the ship as energetically as the young man from the country searches the stage at Maskelyne and Cook's.'

'Yes,' said the Physician. 'So I suppose. Pray, sir, may a plain man, who is no conjurer, inquire how this stupendous miracle—this conversion of water into whisky—was accomplished?'

'I told you that the Devil would be too cunning. Well, now, Mavis, my servant——'

'Oh yes, I remember—Mavis, your servant. Ah! he is the Devil, then?'

'I sometin es think he is. Well, like all great conjuring tricks, it was really quite simple. When I told Mavis to get a Captain, I was not aware that he had cousins in the seafaring line. Luckily for me, he had. One of these was a Captain—a very good Captain too, though he had lost every situation, one after the other, through his habits of drink. This I did not find out until afterwards. Otherwise, the best of Captains. He pretended to be wholly unacquainted even with the taste of spirits—a Rechabite from his youth upwards.'

'That was an excellent beginning!'

'Truly. Then there was the Steward. He too, as afterwards appeared, was a cousin, and had got into trouble on the Orient Line in connection with the Bottle Department. He, too, professed total abstinence—said that he abhorred even the appearance of alcohol. Well, you see, with those two on board and Mavis, who I ought to have known cannot live without his beer and his grog, it was pretty certain that there would be always something on board. In fact, they had enough on board, to sink the ship, but they kept the thing dark. At dinner and at luncheon we had apolinaris.'

'Yes. And how did this admirable servant convey the drink to your cabin?'

'By a little contrivance. And it shows what a man of resource my servant is. He knew what would happen very well, and he provided accordingly. So that when it did come, and that with a rush, and hardly any warning, so that I verily thought it was going to kill me outright, there it was all ready for me. "Mavis," I said, "get me the whisky and I'll give you four hundred." You see, I had promised him two hundred if he brought me home with a sober record.'

'Good. Mavis was a far-seeing servant.'

'So he whispered what I was to do. Then your two doctors searched the cabin and my pockets. They left not a corner: they took out the mattresses and the pillows and the cushions. When they were quite sure that there was nothing for me, they allowed me to go in, and left me to wrestle it out.'

'Left you. Fools!'

'To wrestle it out, they said. Then they sat down and

watched outside the door. They watched all night. But the moment they were out of the cabin I unscrewed a certain ornamental knob and drew out of it a tube with a mouthpiece; and the tube, Doctor, was connected with a cask of whisky. Now do you understand the subtlety of the Devil?

'I do. I thoroughly understand it.'

'As for Mavis, he earned that money. I had a charming voyage, varied by several little episodes of that description. We were all pleased, especially the two men of science.'

'That is all you have to tell me, I suppose,' said the Physician coldly.

'That is all. I have given up the idea of trying to resist any more. If I cannot be cured except by my own resistance, I can never be cured at all.'

'No; you are now beyond hope. Well, Mr. Atheling, it is a thousand pities to see a splendid man ruined. Shall I read your future?'

'If you can, Doctor.'

'Your will has now grown so weak that you cannot resist: you shrink with terror from the mere idea of resistance: the attack, which is a kind of spasmodic action, and should be met and defeated by resolute refusal to yield, is now magnified, in your imagination, into a terrible, monstrous, powerful Devil, to whom you surrender basely and cowardly without a blow. Well, you will go on in this miserable weakness, growing slowly or swiftly, as the case may be, worse and worse, as a rudderless ship drifts slowly or rapidly on a lee shore. The attacks will become more frequent and more violent—perhaps both. You will gradually lose the only thing which now protects you—that small amount of self-respect which makes you hide yourself and your vice when it overtakes you. Presently you will cease to care whether your friends know about it or not. You will no longer have the desire to preserve a good name. All the time your mind will be deteriorating as your will weakens. Remember that on his strength and will depends the whole life of a man. Your judgment in business affairs will be impaired. All your finer qualities—they have already suffered loss—will be destroyed: your learning, your skill, your art, your genius, your eye, your taste—all

will go. In course of time you will become, if you live, an open, acknowledged, and daily drunkard. You will live in this degraded and disgraced condition until, by mere lucky accident, you will take cold, get pneumonia, and so be kicked out of the world you have helped to make worse, into another, where you will receive the treatment due to you. As for your children, if you have any, you will have transmitted to them your inheritance, if it is an inheritance, of alcoholic craving doubled and trebled, with far less power of resistance than that with which you started. Not only are you a coward to yourself, but you are a criminal to your children.'

The Doctor paused and snorted.

George heard him without the least indignation, remonstrance, or surprise.

'All these things,' he said quietly, 'I have said to myself over and over again. I have said them in agonies of reproach and shame. I say them no longer. I feel no longer any pangs of shame. As for what you prophesy concerning my children, I have made up my mind to have none.'

'So you say now. Wait for a year or two. Wait till your loneliness becomes more than you can bear. Young gentleman, any weak creature may go and get married; but it requires a far stronger man than you to remain unmarried.'

'I see before me, in place of the future you have drawn, a life of harmless obscurity. I have parted with my old ambitions, because they are no longer possible to attain. I have no career before me: I can attempt nothing. When I die, the waves will close over me, and I shall be forgotten in a moment and regretted by no one. Six times in the year I shall go into retreat. In the intervals I shall be calm and contented. The craving will not grow upon me: it has not grown for two years: it does not come oftener than it did——'

'Because you are young, and have still left some of the resources of your former life. You read—you walk—you think. Wait till you grow weary of life without an aim.'

'If your prophecy, or half of it, even, were to come true, do you think that I should continue to live?'

'Why, man, with such a vice as yours, you would love

your life too well. Besides, your will would be too weak. You could no longer bear to face a violent death, even to escape the greatest shames possible to life. In your strong frame already beats the heart of a coward.' George laughed. 'When I told you this once before, you winced: now you laugh. Observe the deterioration that has already set in. You laugh!'

'If you like. I never think of the thing that way now. What would have been shameful and disgraceful two years ago, is now a part of my life—part of my life. I feel no more disgraced because I am afflicted with this incurable disease, than if I had rheumatism. It is all habit. I now understand how the worst criminal can entertain the most virtuous sentiments. I am resigned to the inevitable.'

'One thing might save you: it is the only thing. For the sake of others—for some great personal attachment—for some great scare on their account—you might make the sacrifice of suffering. Or you might make the sacrifice of death. For your own sake—never!'

'Then I shall never make either sacrifice. I am, as you say, too great a coward. And I can never again care greatly for any human creature.'

George went away. He had expected no help from the Physician, and he got none. He was like one who sees Heaven—all glorious and blissful and eternal—before him, but fears to pass through the fire of purgatory which lasts but a little while. Many such souls there must be waiting on the bank, cowering at the sight of the cleansing flame. Yet he knew that he was getting worse: his purposeless life, as well as his surrender, was dragging him down. But he had formed a resolution: he would work. At least, he would have some object to live for, if it were only to earn his daily bread.

'Mavis,' he said that evening, 'I have seen my old Doctor again. I told him that the Devil has proved more cunning than he thought. He isn't acquainted with the Devil, that Doctor.'

'No, sir.'

'He thinks he is, but he is not. The Doctor doesn't seem best pleased with the result of the voyage. He expected better things. Well, we did promise a different

ending, didn't we? We did start with the intention of completing the job?'

'We did, sir,' said Mavis.

'And we have completed it, though not exactly in the way we intended.'

'Come, sir; after all, it don't do you any harm. Even the Doctor can't say but what you look as well and as vigorous as ever. Lately, too, they haven't come quite so strong, have they?'

'Well, I don't know about that.'

'A drunk now and again: an honest drunk, and have done with it,' said Mavis. 'What harm can that do any man? Why, that's the way the sailors live. They couldn't keep it up if it wasn't for the looking forward. Think of the gentlemen drinking their champagne every day! Why, it's far worse. As for you, sir, a more temperate and sober gentleman don't live. You ought to take a pride in yourself, for your moderation. What is it? A couple of bottles of whisky once in two months. Spread it out—a quarter of a bottle in a week—why, it's nothing!'

This was the longest speech Mavis had ever made.

'Very good, Mavis,' said his master. 'I will seek consolation in that reflection. Meantime, I am going to make a change. You shall have the cottage to live in. I shall go and live in some part of London where I am not known. I will let you know where, so that you may be on the spot when——'

'Very well, sir,' said Mavis.

'I have made up my mind to start afresh in a new place, and on a new plan. I shall take another name. I shall go and live a great deal lower down in the world. I shall no longer call myself a gentleman. I shall not be a man of fortune, but one who works for his daily bread. Perhaps my new companions will forgive any little eccentricities of conduct, if they do discover things. On the point of personal dignity or self-respect they will probably be less exacting. So that if the Doctor's prophecy comes true—and I'm sure I don't know that it will not—they will not turn me out into the wide, wide world with ignominy. There may even be fellow-sufferers among them. Well, do you understand?'

'Perfectly, sir. Am I to find you a place and a companion?'

'No. This time, Mavis, I will look about for myself. You provided me once with a Captain and a Steward and a nice little workable knob, didn't you? This time, I will find for myself what I want.'

'What am I to do, sir?'

'You can go and live in the cottage. I will pay you the same wages. I will also pay the rent of the cottage and your own board. You can live anywhere else if you like; but you must keep the cottage ready for me. Until I have learned the feelings of my new friends on the subject, I will keep on the cottage. You will call for me at the regular times, and carry me off and look after me as usual. Otherwise, I shall have no more work for you.'

'Very well, sir.'

'You will be an idle man; be a discreet man as well. Guard those secrets of mine. And when next you meet me, remember that you are not my servant, but an old acquaintance with whom I have business relations.'

'Very well, sir,' said Mavis.

CHAPTER VII.

OF PENELOPE AND HER WOOERS.

'WHY will you still press me?' asked the girl. 'I have answered your question already a dozen times.'

'I press you,' replied the man, 'because your answer appears to me every day more and more unreasonable. Surely, the time has come at last for you to give me another kind of reply—if only another reason for——'

'No, my friend; I have only one answer. I am already, as you know, engaged. Therefore, I cannot listen to any talk on this subject, even from you—my old tutor.'

'You are engaged to a man who has neither written to you, nor visited you, nor sent any kind of message to you, for five years.'

'That is true. It is also true—and I must not forget it—that when last I saw him I assured him that I should wait for a release from his own lips. I have waited, and I still wait.'

'He went away. He has sent you no message since that

time. You know that three or four years ago he drew money from his bank. Therefore, he was then alive. But he sent you no letter or message. That shows that he thought you were free. Perhaps he is dead. To you, however, the question need not be raised. You are free.'

'If rich men like George die, their death is heard of by their heirs. I do not believe that he is dead. Let him, if he chooses, set me free.'

'Then he has forgotten you. Good Heavens! As if that were possible!'

'In either case I must wait. If he is dead—until I know the fact. If he has forgotten me—until he tells me so himself.'

This conversation was only one of many turning upon the same point, the nature of which is sufficiently indicated. It was carried on in the library of a great house in South Kensington. The library was also the girl's study. It contained a good collection of books, and on the table was heaped the pile of papers, magazines, and books, with the inevitable waste-paper basket beside them, which denote the presence of the scholar or the writer. These two young people met each other as often as they possibly could: they walked together: they rode together: they argued on the things which most interested them; and continually came back to the same question and the same answer, with a commentary on the latter furnished by the young man. For the girl was so constant to a forgetful lover as to remain faithful after five years of neglect and silence: and the young man was so persistent a suitor that he returned continually to his question, and as continually remonstrated with the answer.

The girl, you perceive, was Elinor Thanet, now three-and-twenty years of age. It seems old to those who are still eighteen; but it is not regarded by those who are past three-and-twenty as a great age, even for a girl. And at three-and-twenty there is still the first sweet bloom upon the cheek, and there is still some of the first fresh spring of youth.

When we last saw Elinor she was on the point of going to Cambridge, there to achieve the honour and glory of a First Class. She fulfilled the first part of the programme; that is to say, she did go to Newnham. But as for the

second part, that event did not come off. Perhaps the defection of her lover disheartened her : perhaps the intricacies of Latin prose worried her : perhaps she lost her ambitions : whatever the reason, she did not present herself at the Honours Examination. Her friends, however, said that she could have taken a First Class if she had pleased. Many thousands of pass men say the same thing of themselves ; but their friends commonly accept the statement without zeal, even with frigidity. Few, indeed, have it said of them. So that Elinor retired from her University course with great and uncommon distinction. Not to take a First Class when you can have it for the trouble of asking for it, argues a superiority that has never yet been found, even among the College Dons. The consciousness of this distinction was doubtless the reason why Elinor, on returning to London, treated the common herd of admirers with so much disdain. Her own common herd was more numerous than that of many other girls, because she was going to be rich. Every picture, even the most beautiful, looks all the better for being richly framed.

Elinor Thanet was also distinguished by a very remarkable circumstance. She was engaged, and her lover had disappeared. At this time no tidings had been heard of him for three years. She herself had heard nothing of him, or from him, for five years. But for three years he had drawn no money from his bank, and had made no communication with his lawyers. Yet he was a rich man, having an income of many thousand pounds a year, all of which lay accumulating—a great mass of unused wealth. And certain cousins who were greatly interested in his welfare were beginning to ask when the missing man should be considered dead.

These circumstances—the First Class which had not been taken : the lover who was not to be found : and the fortune which would come to this young lady—made her a person of the greatest interest. As yet no one had succeeded in persuading her that her engagement had been broken off long ago. No other girl ever had so convenient a weapon of defence. Nay, of offence as well, because it could be used to drive away a persistent suitor as well as to ward off a first approach.

The only man who was allowed to persist was John Carew, Professor of Political Economy in Gresham College,

sometime Lecturer at Newnham. The word 'sometime' sounds well, yet John Carew was at present only six-and-twenty. He was one of those who march to the front early. Many men there are—most men—who can never march to the front. Their place is in the ranks: they are too diffident as to their natural gifts and graces for any ambition at all: they are afraid of themselves: they cannot picture themselves incurring vast responsibilities and exercising great authority. Not so such a man as John Carew. He strides straight up the hill. 'My place,' he says, 'is in the front row. Make way, if you please, for me.' After a bit they have got to make way and to put him there, when very likely he shows that he was right.

Up to the present, as you have seen, John Carew has done very well, as well as can be expected by the age of twenty-six. He had no family interest or connections: he was the son of one of those successful clergymen who get a newly-built district church in a suburb inhabited by clerks. His father had no money to spare: yet this fortunate youth received the best education that the country can give, proceeded to the University, took the very best degree possible, became a Fellow; and at twenty-six was Professor in a London College, with as great a reputation as one so young can well obtain, and with every promise of greater distinction to follow. All this magnificent success sprang out of a school scholarship, and it is the history of successful men by the hundred.

John Carew, however, was not inclined to stop at a College Professorship. He meant to rule a larger class than gathered in his lecture-room. That he had no money was a hindrance. Fortune favoured him again, because she threw in his way a girl, beautiful and belonging to the world of society, and wealthy, with whom he allowed himself to fall in love. Had this girl not been wealthy, John Carew would not have allowed himself the luxury of love. Since she was wealthy, he loved her very dearly and sincerely. He meant, if he could, to marry her. He meant, by means of her wealth and position, to advance himself. A perfectly desirable girl from every point of view does not present herself to every young man; and especially to a young man who makes it his aim to take no step in life, especially not such a step as marriage, unless it be a step in advance.

John Carew's face was irregularly good-looking, and bore the stamp of resolution and of courage. He had the chin and mouth of a man who meant to have his own way. He had the clear-cut nostrils, the straight eyebrows, the steady eyes, and the square forehead of one whose mind was active, and happiest when working on things hard and tough to the general multitude. It was the face, the head, and the figure of the fighting man. And in these days when the world is looking in all directions for leaders, I really think that John Carew has as good a chance as anybody of showing what stuff there is in him.

'Let us talk of something else, then.' He went to the table and took up a book. 'Tell me what you are working at.'

'Another time. Something,' she said, 'has brought back the memory of my old lover—I know not what note has been struck. I seem to hear his voice and to see him standing before me. I do not think there is anything, my friend, that I should wish for more than to see him again, and to hear from his own lips what he has done, why he went away, and why he has forgotten me altogether.'

'You agree, then, that he must have forgotten you?'

'Something happened to him—the nature of which I cannot so much as guess—something happened which altered not only the whole course of his life, but his very nature. What can alter a man so much in three months? Not any ill stroke of fortune: not ill-health: not any other law business—at least, that I ever heard of. What could it have been?'

'I do not know; I cannot even guess.'

'Consider! He has gone away: he has left his great wealth untouched: he has not drawn any money for three years.'

'He is probably dead.'

'No; I am certain that he is not dead. We should have heard of his death, somehow. Why did he go away? What is the cause of his keeping away? If it were love or marriage, he would still want his money.'

'And you—if you were to meet him, how would you receive him?'

'He would be always my brother—I have not a spark of any other feeling left for him. At one time it was different.

I was very fond of him, and thought a great deal about him. He was in my thoughts nearly all day. That was because he was always with me, I suppose. We used to play together. I don't know even how we became engaged. No word was said, I know, but one day we met with a warmer pressure of the hand—and that was all. Poor dear boy! He went out of my thoughts—Cambridge drove him out—and he went out of my heart. I have long ceased to lament him, or to fancy that I love him; and yet—yet—I want to hear from his own lips—and the last words that I said to him was a promise of constancy!

'A promise—yes! but since for all these years you have heard nothing—whether he is dead or alive; or if you heard that he was living three years ago, the fact that he never wrote a line shows that he considers you free long ago—long ago. Elinor, do not waste time over such a man any longer.'

'Find him for me. Formerly ladies enjoined great tasks upon their knights—'

'Will you call me your knight?'

'Yes.' She gave him her hand, which he kissed. 'But not, yet, anything more. This is my task which I lay upon you. Find that missing lover. Tell me where he is. It is really a very little world. Find out where he is and bring him to me, or me to him. If you wish to please me, find my faithless lover.'

'If you had ordered me to slay a giant or a dragon, I should have complied contentedly. But for finding your old lover—— What is his name?'

'His name is Atheling.'

'Atheling? I seem to have heard the name somewhere; I don't remember at this moment. Atheling?'

'He has a pleasant, musical voice, rather low. A clever man, with ideas. He started with the intention of being something great—Prime Minister. He was as ambitious as you.'

'Am I ambitious?'

'You are nothing else, except that you are clever—much cleverer than George, who would not have got beyond Secretary for the Colonies. I believe the stupid man in the Cabinet is always put into that post.'

'Well, I have his name. What shall I do next? I cannot search the wide world for him, because my lectures forbid

my absence. But I can start inquiries. I believe that when a gentleman is wanted by the police they send round a description. But then the police know where such gentlemen as they want mostly resort, which is a great advantage to them. They don't know where such a man as your friend may be found.'

'You are much more clever than any police.'

'Let me rather slay a giant for you, Elinor. I would rather kill a dozen giants.'

'Their death would bring me neither joy nor profit. Let the poor giants live, and find my poor old friend.'

'It is such a wonderful thing—such a mysterious thing! Why should the man go away? Why should he keep away? How does he live? He must be dead.'

'A man doesn't die without somebody knowing about it. Death is a public thing, even for the meanest man. Everybody knows it. People find out what the man died of, who he is, and all about him. It is a thing which cannot be concealed any more than a birth.'

'He may be in San Francisco—or in Hong Kong—or anywhere you please!'

'No; he was a thorough Briton. He would never be comfortable except at home. He would never be happy unless he was living his old familiar life. Where he is living, and why, I cannot tell. Find him for me, my friend; find him out!'

CHAPTER VIII.

IN ARCADIA

THERE is a suburb—a district—of London, where those reside who have to court happiness on a hundred and fifty pounds—two hundred pounds—even three hundred pounds—a year. Not all those who enjoy incomes of such a figure live in this district, but few live here who are burdened with a larger income. It is a pleasant country: the roads in it are broad and planted with limes or planes: the houses are nearly all built after the same pattern, one of a kind which does not require the pencil or the imagination of the architect. They are small houses—your only true comfort in this cold climate lies in snugness. Each house has a base-

ment sitting-room, which in winter is commonly used as the family living-room: on the ground floor is the best room: above are three or four bedrooms: at the back is a narrow strip of garden, in which those who are clever and can give all their leisure to the task contrive to grow quantities of flower-bearing plants: it is also useful on Monday morning for a drying ground, when the incense of soapsuds arises weekly in a fragrant steam and ascends to the Goddess of Cleanliness; then the back garden presents a waving white surface broken only, to the eye of the upper story, by the green poles: the garden generally has a swing in it for the children, and in many cases there is even a green arbour where the gentlemen of the family may take, in the cool of a summer evening, the solace of tobacco. In front of the house is a small, a minute garden, which has sometimes only a single laurel in it, but more often boasts of a laburnum or a lime, or even a hawthorn. And many of the houses are covered all over with Virginia Creeper, so that the autumn aspect of this quarter is all glorious without.

Apart from the convenience of the residences and the leafy beauty of the roads, I have often thought that the most precious quality of the district is the entire absence of anything which can humble the residents and make them envious. No great houses rear their lofty fronts beside these simple two-storied structures: no one possesses a private carriage, not even the doctor: nobody keeps more than one servant: there are no dinner-parties; a dress-coat is absolutely not known; dinner is regarded, not as a function or religious ceremony, but as an operation—like stoking the engine—necessary, expensive, even with the best management, and a thing to be jealously kept within limits. Yet, though there are no dress-coats, think not that there is no society. There is a great deal of society; young folks enjoy greater facilities for meeting each other than persons who obey the stricter law of convention and propriety: the girls get lots of pretty things to put on—most pretty things, in fact, are cheap—though they have to make up these pretty things with their own pretty hands, for their own pretty figures. As for getting engaged, they are all engaged, sometimes half a dozen times over—but not more than one at a time, so lofty is the moral standard—before they finally settle down. There is an unwritten law, obeyed

by all but the reckless and the unthinking, that a prudent pair should not marry until the income reaches a hundred and twenty: this once achieved, they form the procession, strike up the 'Wedding March,' and march up the aisle before the clergyman, conscious of having done their duty in waiting, and now fully justified in commencing as Adam and Eve in a new garden of Eden from which they hope never to be turned out. There are dancing-classes in the winter: in the summer there are excursions, trips, tourists' tickets, and outings: there are lectures, concerts, readings: and there is a social life of the church and the chapel—of late years Church has discovered that she, too, must come down and associate with her people if she would keep them out of Chapel.

They are never dull. When men and women congregate together and know each other as friends and neighbours, they are never dull. Those places only are dull where the houses stand side by side, and street lies parallel with street, and no man knoweth his neighbour. Bloomsbury is dull; South Kensington is dull; but this place—never.

One must not specify its exact situation on the map of London. To name the place, if this history should come to be widely read, might cause a rush, an influx, an immigration of strange folk who have nothing in common with these people but their income. This would run up the rents, enhance the value of the pews, and enlarge the views of the butcher, which are already, Heaven knows, large enough! Call it Clerkland, but it should be called Arcadia.

Quite the prettiest road in Clerkland is Daffodil Road: it is at once the broadest, the best planted with trees, and the most flowery. There are flowers in every window; there is a Virginia Creeper over every house, a lilac or a laburnum in every front, a lime-tree for every two houses, along the whole road. The line is broken by a red-brick Church set among trees, and already pleasantly wrapped in ivy—the Church of St. Luke the Physician—where the services are musical and bright: the word 'bright,' as generally applied to the modern church service, has a meaning quite peculiar, but then everything should have its own adjectives. There are forty-two houses in the Daffodil Road, each with its own name all to itself, though the post-office, which lacks poetical sentiment, insists upon a number as well.

The residents in the road mostly know each other, either with familiarity and intimate friendship or with a speaking acquaintance. And they know each other's private affairs: they know where every husband has his berth, and what is his salary; what his family, what his wife's methods of household management, and, pretty nearly, the weekly bill of the butcher. It is not so much in a spirit of prying curiosity that this knowledge is sought—curiosity, doubtless, enters to a certain extent into the inquiry—we are but human,—as in the desire to get, if possible, another wrinkle into the great and wonderful mystery of managing. For, lo you! we who boast that we are men—men the creators—men the inventors—men who carry along the world—men who discover, create, enlarge,—we men have never imagined or devised anything that surpasses in ingenuity, wit, contrivance, and marvels of results, the great Art of Management invented by Woman, and carried in this suburb to its utmost perfection—a miracle and passing wonder of human skill. It is indeed a most amazing art. Understand that she who has to bring up a family of six on an income of two hundred and fifty pounds a year: to educate them: to teach them manners: to make them appear in the streets neatly and, for the girls, prettily dressed, must for ever be studying this wonderful art. She does not go out to spend: she stays at home and manages: she does not buy this or that as the whim seizes her, if she thinks that she wants it: she manages. That is to say, for the most part she does without—she waits. But—consider—when at last, after patient waiting, she arrives at the power of getting a thing that is to add so much to the family comfort, she purchases it with a far fuller joy, a far deeper satisfaction, a far greater thankfulness than can ever be enjoyed by that unhappy Dives who only experiences a slight sense of something lacking before he orders and buys a thing. The matron who manages gets the full flavour and enjoyment of everything that she buys or possesses.

It is not, indeed, an unhappy life, that of the *petites gens*—the Folk of the very small income. They have to make their things last a long while: they hardly ever have as much dinner as they could put away had they a free hand, so to speak: they must consider the penny for the omnibus and the halfpenny for the evening paper: anything that

cannot be made at home wants money—therefore everything that can be made at home is made there: the clever husband with his own hands and the family gimlet executes the little repairs of the house and furniture: sometimes, but not often, he is so clever that he can actually make things—cabinets, picture-frames, cupboards, garden-seats, benches: his wife does the repairs of all the garments except the boots—to the philosopher it is difficult to understand why she has not long since resolved to mend the boots as well as the socks: the one servant does the washing. It is astonishing how much may be saved when husband and wife are thrifty and know how to manage. Above all, and as the first consideration, one must not eat or drink too much: the children are expected to finish up the bread-and-butter, and not to ask for more: everything is doled—the tea by half-spoonfuls, the milk drop by drop as if it was a precious cordial, the butter is spread thin, and the cheese is cut in bits the size of dice. Well, they have always been accustomed to pare and to save; it is their life: they are never able to buy—they must manage.

Among the families of Daffodil Road was, until a few weeks ago, one which differed in many respects from those around them. The differences were in points minute to those above and below, but of great importance to those of the same level. To begin with, the head of the household, understood to be by birth an Australian, was in appearance quite unlike the rest of the householders. They, for the most part, are small in stature and slight in figure: they mostly, in middle-age, incline to primness: they are all, even in earliest youth, neat in apparel, as becomes those who are taught at the outset the mere money value of personal appearance. This Australian was a big man: he had a big frame, big hands, a big head, and a big brown beard. He was careless in his dress, which generally consisted of some brown stuff: he wore a pot-hat: he had such small regard for appearance that he smoked a pipe in his front garden: he was irregular in his church attendance: he was not respectful to the clergy, speaking to the curate as if he was his equal: he was always genial, always ready to talk and to laugh. He laughed quite freely, this singular young man. In this quarter they are seldom given much to mirth—mere idle mirth—because, you see, they must for ever be

thinking of Management, an art which demands that the votaries give themselves up wholly to their Mistress.

He was not, in fact, in the least point like a City man. He had no respect for wealth, and cared nothing about money-making. Now, to these simple people the honour and glory of toiling all day long in order to make money for their masters is increased in proportion to the amount of money they do make. When the year has been fat and the garnerers are full, they swell out with pride, they give themselves airs among their fellows. Why not? It is the part of a good servant, says the copybook, which we too often neglect, to rejoice at the good fortune of his master. Such observations as fell from the lips of Mr. George Humphrey, so far from sympathizing with this view, were calculated even to make the clerks ashamed of their zeal. He asked openly what good it did them when the year's balance brought an extra ten thousand or so to their master's gains.

Of course his profession was known. It was that of a journalist. Your true City man regards the calling with unconcealed dislike. The pay is supposed to be uncertain: there are no regular rises in salary: a man at fifty may make no more than a youth of twenty: there are no fixed hours. To a regular and methodical man the alleged uncertainties of the profession make it abhorrent and abhorred. Why, the journalist does not even want an office, a thing granted to the humblest beginner in Clerkdom: he may do his work at home; while his wife is ironing the linen; or he may sit in public-houses and write; or he may go to Free Libraries and write there; or he may find a corner in the printing-house and write there; or he may even write in the street—horrible! There is no dignity in such a profession. And he is paid by the job: even a leader-writer gets so much for his article: one might as well be a working-man and get paid by the piece.

George Humphrey belonged, it is true, to the lower walks of journalism. He had what is called a permanent appointment as leader-writer, paragraphist, and sub-editor of the *Clerkland Observer* (with which is incorporated the *Arcadian Gazette*), a local paper of more importance than those who only read *The Times* would believe. This job brought him in two pounds ten a week; but then he wrote nearly the

whole paper, and it took him two days and a half out of the solid six. He did it so well that when, as happened regularly once every two months, he had business which took him out of town for three or four days, the proprietor gave him leave to go and find a substitute at his own expense. In the remaining three and a half days of the week George Humphrey occupied himself in writing short papers for magazines, essays, sketches, notes of travel, papers on books and authors, and so forth. He was a man of industry and reading: he had travelled much and observed much: he wrote in a pleasing style that had flashes and sparks of brilliancy. Consider the enormous number of weekly journals that now have to find attractive stuff for their insatiate pages! Paste and scissors will do a great deal, but it will not do everything. Such a man as George Humphrey, with so much experience and versatility, can always sell his productions, even if he cannot command his price. The latter, indeed, varies according to the liberality of the proprietor and the circulation of the paper. It varies from nothing a column—one could tell harrowing stories, were this the place—up to a whole pound a column, which was George's highest price. In this way and by working twice as hard as any man in any other calling for the same money, he made an income large for the place and people among whom he lived, and no more precarious than that of a Doctor or of a Solicitor in practice, though to the City clerk it seemed an uncertain, hand-to-mouth, way of living.

The wife of the journalist sat at her open window one evening in May, between six and seven. The evenings of the sweet spring season of this year were as balmy as the poet's dream of May. The day had been warm and bright: the sloping sun shone all along Daffodil Road upon the rows of limes in their pale chloral early foliage, upon the lilacs and the laburnums and the hawthorn all in full splendour: upon the Virginia Creepers, fast shooting up their long buds. Daffodil Road was glorified. It has two such brief periods of glory: one in the spring, too often spoiled by prolonged east wind; one in the autumn, also too often spoiled by September rain and premature frost.

Mrs. Humphrey sat with her work in her hands: the cradle of her baby at her foot, and her two-year-old rolling

over a ball on the floor. That she was happy and contented was manifested by her attitude, by her repose, by the low soft croon of her voice, as she bent over her sewing or looked up at her boy.

Nettie Humphrey was inclined to be small and slight in figure, like so many London girls; yet taller than most. Her shoulders were rather narrow. Her head, however, was well shaped and large in proportion to the rest of her: her features were regular, and her eyes of dark blue—where did she get those dark-blue eyes?—were certainly fine. Her mouth, firm and rather square, showed the possibility of that precious quality which we call character. The room in which she sat was furnished in a taste quite unusual. For this quarter, while it clings to a best room which it has not quite ceased to call a best parlour, runs to stiffness and ceremony; loves a central table with books round it, and an ornament in the middle of it; likes to have a looking-glass over the fireplace; insists upon a piano, even though nobody can play upon it; and covers up every chair with things still called antimacassars, the name pointing to the dark ages when men and women plastered their hair with scented grease and wore it long. Moreover, the taste of this quarter is great on mantel-shelf ornaments, inclining still to hanging crystals and pink-glass jars, and it is not comfortable without a great hanging gas chandelier. This room, on the other hand, looked like a room for living in. There was a comfortable couch, ready to be wheeled up to the fire: there were two easy-chairs: there was no central table: there was no gas chandelier at all: there was no great looking-glass. It was furnished, in short, much as if Mr. William Morris himself had been asked to step in and do what he thought best. On the walls there were pictures which the visitors could not understand. Not their idea, you see, of what a picture should be. And one side of the room was clothed, covered, hidden by books.

Nettie looked at the clock on the mantel-shelf. 'Half-past six,' she said. 'He will not come home before eight at earliest.'

She resumed her work with a little sigh. Then she heard footsteps outside, and got up to open the door.

Her visitor was young, like herself, and a married woman. She wore a hat and no gloves. 'I just ran across, Nettie,

she said, throwing herself into a chair. 'It's so dull at home when there is no work to be done. How's baby? How are you, Georgie, boy? Where's George? How do you like your new bonnet?'

She was Nettie's younger sister, Victoria, recently married to a clerk in a Bank on a hundred and fifty. Victoria was like her sister, but smaller: prettier, in her way, yet of much less consequence, to look at. She was very pretty, indeed, of a beauty quite common, the small-sized beauty: small, regular features; bright, gray eyes; light hair, of the fluffy kind; very small hands; and a mouth which, while it certainly might be called a rosebud, had also in it that slight but clear-cut curve which should be dreaded by lovers, because it denotes temper. She was Lady Venus the Little—and Venus with the vice of temper. Lady Venus the Great—Venus the unapproachable—can never be put into a bad temper. It is impossible for her to be in a bad temper, even with those whose hearts do not beat at the aspect and thought of her. She pities them, but she is not irritated by the coldness of such natures.

'We are all very well, Vic. How is Charlie?'

'Charlie went off this morning in a hateful temper. As if a woman is not to be allowed to speak! I did speak up, though, and I will. I dare say he will come round again during the day. If he doesn't, I don't care. Sulking hurts him more than me. What have you got here? A new chair? My goodness! You had a new chair six months ago. My dear, no income could stand it!'

'George buys nothing that he cannot afford. And we are saving money. Do not worry about our dreadful extravagance. Vic dear, mother was here this morning. She had a good deal to say, too, about the butcher's bill.'

'Well, it isn't what we were brought up to, is it? As much beef and mutton as you like, and all your washing put out, and your dresses bought ready-made for you——' Vic sighed. 'You ought to think yourself a lucky girl, Nettie. I wish to goodness I had your housekeeping money. But there—it's no use wishing. Some day, perhaps, when Charlie gets made assistant-manager——'

'Patience, Vic dear.'

The girl got up and began impatiently turning over the things on the table. Among them was a photograph album.

She opened it. There were the family portraits—her father with a book in his hand, and the look of a philosopher equal to the mightiest problems—her mother with a self-conscious smile—herself looking saucy, more like a chorister in a burlesque than a respectable married woman—George, big and bearded.

‘Nettie,’ she said, ‘haven’t you got any photographs of George’s relations? He must have some, you know. We’ve all got father and mother and brothers and cousins—where are his?’

‘They are in Australia, somewhere.’

‘Well, if I were you I’d never rest till I found out all about them—’

‘My dear, I do know all about them.’

‘Their names and their professions. They may be only shopkeepers. Not that I’d cast that in George’s teeth. As Charlie says, we can’t all be born gentlemen. Though, to be sure, I never would have married Charlie unless I knew that his family were respectable.’

‘I am perfectly satisfied upon that point,’ said Nettie, with dignity.

‘George certainly—whatever people think—*seems* to be all right,’ said her sister doubtfully. ‘His manners are sometimes free, but I suppose it’s Australian ways. And he seems to be making good money in his way—though, thank goodness, it is not our way. “Better a small screw and certainty,” says Charlie, “than to wake up every morning without knowing what you’ll make in the day.” And certainly George goes on sober, and he’s kind to you, and fond of the children. He might listen to mother with a little more patience. But we don’t know his family, that’s very certain. And—a curious thing, Nettie—Charlie was talking the other day to a gentleman, an old schoolfellow of his, who’s been out to Melbourne, where he was an auctioneer’s clerk. Well, he says that he never heard the name of George Humphrey there at all. I thought I’d tell you, Nettie.’

‘Thank you for nothing, Vic! What does it matter to me whether Charlie’s friend has heard of George or not? Melbourne is a big place. There are half a million people in Melbourne. Perhaps George has never heard of your auctioneer’s clerk.’

'To be sure, clerks and journalists,' said Victoria, putting down the album with a little sniff, 'do not always mix in the same circles. So that, as you say, it may mean nothing. But when it comes to hiding away your relations as if you were ashamed of them, never talking about them, never writing to them, getting no letters from them—what does it point to? Everybody thinks the same thing. It means that you are ashamed of your relations. Well, my dear, you're not married to George's relations, are you? It doesn't matter much—only when I go on Sundays to take tea with Charlie's mother, and all in a respectable way, I do feel a bit sorry for you. I dare say it's all right. You've got more housekeeping-money than your mother and me put together. You've lots to be grateful for. Your babies are beauties: and as for your things and your furniture, though this is not my idea of a best room, they are as good as can be. You're far better off than before you were married. So that it would be a thousand pities if you were to find out anything—wouldn't it? or if your money was to vanish away—wouldn't it?'

Nettie nodded and laughed. She was not in the least alarmed or vexed by these gloomy forebodings. In fact, she was used to them. Her family never failed to warn her that Fortune is fickle, that no one knew her husband's relations, and that he had no fixed salary. Her sister Vic, especially, gathered consolation from considering these dangers. Her own housekeeping required the most watchful management: her 'things' were on a very limited scale. But then she was safe with her husband: she knew his family. He had a safe income, though it was small. Her sister, on the other hand, though she spent so much money, was married to an adventurer whose family was a mystery, and who neglected his church. I do not suppose that she actively desired her sister's ruin; but she certainly consoled herself in times of the greater tightness with thinking of her sister's perils.

When Victoria was gone, Nettie worked on in silence. She knew very well, she said to herself, all that there was to know about her husband. His father had land up country, outside Melbourne: he himself had no brothers or sisters: he had inherited this bit of land and a trifle. He had been educated, and was now in England making a living,

and a very fair living too, by journalism. Everything was quite straightforward: nothing to hide. Yet, to her own family, the case was full of mystery.

Another step outside the door. This time her brother Horatio.

The Patager family consisted of Mr. Samuel Patager and his spouse; two sons, Horatio and Herbert; and two daughters, Antoinette and Victoria. The selection of the Christian name is, in all classes of society, a matter of great delicacy and importance. What names more happy than those four? The daughters happily married: one of the sons married; there remained under the paternal roof the younger son, Horatio.

Horatio was a bounder. No more illustrious bounder than Horatio in the whole quarter. In his bounding he practised, as far as his means allowed, all those arts and accomplishments belonging to the profession. He dressed, as well as things would allow, in the latest fashion: he played billiards: he talked of actresses: he attended dancing-classes: he spoke familiarly of things unattainable: he put shillings or half-crowns—when he had any to spare—on the favourite: he smoked cigarettes: he was, in short, a commonplace, pasty-faced, unwholesome young man, who should have been taken away and made to serve in the ranks for two years.

The other brother, Herbert, was a good young man. By trade also a clerk, by profession he was a good young man. The story of the good young man belongs to another place—perhaps to another writer. He does not belong to this story. Let us, therefore, with a word of gratitude for one good young man in this world of wickedness, pass him by. It was Horatio who called upon his sister, not Herbert. Horatio the bounder.

‘I say, Nettie,’ he whispered, looking round the room; ‘George not about, is he?’

‘No; George has not come home yet.’

‘Look here, Nettie—I’m stone broke. Lend me five bob, there’s a good girl. Only five bob—unless you like to make it six.’

‘No!’ she replied shortly. ‘I’ve not got any money to lend. You ought to know that.’

‘George gives you as much as you like. Lend me five

bob, and you shall have it back on Monday. Put it down to the house. He won't find out.'

'Now, Horatio,' Nettie replied, 'if you dare to say such a thing again, I will tell George, and he will——'

'What will George do, I should like to know?'

'Well, perhaps he would take you up by the collar and give you a good shaking. He could, you know, quite easily.'

'Oh! would he? I should like to see him——'

He was small and insignificant to look at; but he fired up at this insult, and looked, for the moment, quite valiant.

'If that is all you've come to say, Horry, you had better go away at once.'

'A nice sister you are, to care more about your own husband than your own brother! Why, there isn't another woman in the world who would be as mean as you. Your husband, indeed!'

'He does behave better than my own brother,' said Nettie. 'He doesn't go about to billiard-rooms, and he doesn't spend his money in music-halls. And now go, or I shall tell George what you say, and you will see how he looks when he is angry.'

'I don't care how he looks. I say, Nettie, some day I will find out what he has done, and why he is in hiding, and then it'll be my turn. See if it won't. Talk of taking me up by the collar! I'll have the knife in, Nettie, and I'll twist it. Who is he? Where are his family? Him to be setting sister against brother! Well, I'll be even with him!'

He disappeared. It will be seen that the 'family,' between them, caused Nettie a good many disagreeable moments.

She had one more visitor. This time it was her father tempted out by the beauty of the evening.

The elder Patager suggested, by his appearance and manner, that he was the confidential clerk of a tall, portly, and pompous City magnate. For he was himself, though not tall, somewhat portly, as if, with a more generous diet, he might assume really aldermanic proportions: and he was a little pompous, out of office hours, as if he imitated his chief at a respectful distance. His face was full, but wanting in the true City fulness—such fulness as cometh of turtle-soup. He spoke slowly and with the air of one

delivering a judgment—yet the judgments were weak. He seemed to endeavour after a sonorous voice, but the result was feeble. One whose conduct of life was really governed by the strictest sense of what was right. There is no employé in the world so honest, so regular, so zealous, or so trustworthy, as a good, elderly, life-long City clerk. He is above suspicion and beyond temptation. He holds no Socialist views as to the division of the spoil. He is contented with his own salary. He has done better in the struggle of life than many other men. Let us recognise the many virtues of the man who keeps all the books for the vast trade in the great City of London, and keeps them honestly and exactly. Every such clerk, in the course of a long and laborious life, builds up for himself, if it were only acknowledged, a monument of ledgers as high as the Dome of St. Paul's.

'Well, my dear,'—Nettie was his favourite, chiefly because her tongue lacked the readiness and the sharpness that belonged to certain other tongues in his household,—'on such a fine evening, one is tempted to forego the intellectual pursuits proper to the time of day. So I thought I would—yes—put down the evening paper and look in. This room always looks comfortable, my dear, perhaps because you are in it, though your mother doesn't hold with the style. And how's George? Out still, looking for jobs? An anxious life—incessant anxiety—nothing safe or secure about it. Give me the regular salary and absence from care.'

Nettie laughed.

'There isn't much worry about George, to look at him. He eats well, and sleeps well.'

'But nothing regular. A day-by-day life. Well, well, we cannot all be in the City. It's something to learn that work keeps up,—something—something to learn so much.'

'Oh! the work is all right. It never was better.'

'I am free to confess, my dear,' the father began, with his approach to pomposity, 'that I was originally deterred by the considerations——'

'Now you are going to say that George is only a journalist. I have heard it so many times already!'

Nettie was getting irritated by their continued reflections on her husband's calling.

'I was about to say that the uncertainty of the work, coupled—'

'No fear about the work. Father, don't worry about George. You've got enough to worry about with Horatio. And look here, father: it's time that things were left off—you know what I mean—things about George. Else there may be trouble. Victoria comes to-day, and Horry after her, and both with the same story. As if there was anything hidden about George! What is there to hide? What do you want to know, that you don't know?'

'My dear, when you allow your daughter to marry a stranger, you naturally ask yourself whether that stranger belongs to a respectable family.'

'You should have asked him three years ago, then. You did ask—and so did I—and I am satisfied.'

'Every man has got relations—even in Australia. He must have a father and a mother.'

'George's parents are dead.'

'To shake hands even with a cousin would be a satisfaction.'

'Go to Australia, then, and shake hands with his cousins there. Seriously, father, I can't have these things said any longer by my own family. If they were said by anyone else, I should very soon tell George. Then I know what he would do: he would go away, he would take his family away.'

'I sometimes think,' said her father meditatively, 'that they would be glad if George was found out in something. They're always talking about him that way.'

'I believe they would!'

The personal pronoun in the plural may mean a great deal. In this case it meant the mother, Victoria and her brothers.

'Words cannot break bones, Nettie.'

'They may break love, though! If I am expected any longer to sit in patience while my husband is slandered, I shall have to consider—that's all, father. And you had better tell them so.'

CHAPTER IX.

AT THE SIGN OF THE BON MARL

At eight o'clock the garden-door swung open and a ponderous step on the gravel announced the return of the Master. Though she had been married for three long years, Nettie sprang from her chair and ran to meet and greet her husband. He came in—the man whom you have already seen under another name—big, bearded, his countenance ruddy and cheerful. Remembering the wise Physician's prophecy, you might expect certain outward and visible signs of decay. Nothing of the kind was visible. Some of the old light gone—some of the old eagerness vanished—but then he is three or four years older. Besides, a big man cannot preserve his youthful alacrity: he cannot be alert: his length of limb and his breadth of shoulder will not allow the exhibition of these qualities: he must move with a certain slowness. Hence it has followed that the great men of the world have always been the little men.

He came into the room, his wife hanging on his arm, and sat down with the sigh of one who has knocked off for the day.

'Have you been busy to-day, dear?' she asked. 'Are you tired?'

He patted her cheek gently.

'I have done a good day's work,' he said. 'And I claim the right to be cross and tired and hungry. And you, Nettie?'

'I will be cross and tired as well, then. The children have been very good. Vic looked in and father. Vic was rather dissatisfied and cross. I'm afraid she doesn't manage very well—and, poor thing! she has got to manage so much. Well, dear?'

He drew her to him with his great arms and kissed her twice fondly.

Three years before he had assured a certain learned Physician that he could never again care much for any human creature: he meant that, having found it necessary to break off one engagement, he did not feel for the moment

equal to beginning another. The learned Physician informed him, in reply, that loneliness would prove too much for him. Prophetic Physician !

He came to this part of London. He drew from the Bank money enough to keep himself going: he proposed to make this serve, and for the future to keep himself by his own work. When such a man, untrained for any profession, thinks of work he turns to journalism. Formerly, he turned to teaching: now, he goes to the nearest newspaper. In the same way, women formerly, if they were compelled to work for themselves, could think of nothing but governessing: now, if that calamitous necessity falls upon them, there are a hundred ways.

George became a journalist. That is, he offered himself to the local paper: for the wages of a grocer's assistant he began to furnish sketches, to look up things of local interest, and to make himself useful. He succeeded: he got on so well that he was now sub-editor—that is to say, he edited the paper, but the Proprietor put his own name at the top.

Presently he widened his work, as you have seen, and began to work for magazines.

He lived alone in lodgings. He knew no one at all: he made no attempt to make friends, and once in two months Mr. Mavis called for him and took him away for two or three days.

He presently found his life intolerably dull. He tried to brighten it by going to places of amusement. They amused him no longer.

Then he made an acquaintance. She was in the Post Office. He got into the habit of speaking to her when he bought stamps. It is quite easy to exchange a word or two of simple courtesy with a young lady who serves out the stamps and receives the telegrams. He discovered that she was a pretty girl—nay, a very pretty girl—that she had really beautiful eyes, and that she seemed, besides, to be a quiet girl of good manners.

One Sunday afternoon he met her in the street. He took off his hat. He assumed the position of an old acquaintance. He walked with her. He informed her of his name and his profession and the place of his residence. He obtained permission to see her home when she left her office next day.

- He went back to his own lodgings a new man—in love once more.

Now she was his wife and the mother of his two children, the dispenser of his wealth. But he had not yet, for her sake, dared to meet and to grapple with that fiend. Still, after the stated interval, Mavis called for him. Still, he went away stimulated, partly by the suggestions of the faithful man-servant, partly by force of habit, and partly by the Devil, into the craving which demanded that he should become a drunken hog. That continued, but it did not increase. The Devil took his tax—two days, or three at the most—every two months. The rest he might give to virtue, temperance and restraint.

‘George,’ Nettie said presently, her thoughts still running upon the question of her husband’s people, ‘this glorious sunshine makes you think of Australia, I suppose?’

‘Sometimes, and of other countries where the sun is warm.’

‘And of your own people too. Wouldn’t you like to see some of them again?’

‘My own people? Oh yes—perhaps,’ he replied carelessly. ‘What made you think of my cousins, Nettie? I am not very anxious to see my cousins, I think. What made you think of them?’

‘I don’t know. At least—but it doesn’t matter, George.’

‘When one has no nearer relations than cousins—first, second, or third—one does not think very much about relations, I suppose. I have had no communication with any of mine for four or five years. I wonder,’ he added reflectively, ‘if they think I am dead? Because in that case——’ He paused with a little chuckle.

‘Are they rich people?’

‘Some of them are very rich indeed. But we mustn’t look to them for any help. Nobody is less inclined to help a man than a rich cousin. He is ashamed of poor relations, to begin with.’

‘They’ve no call to be ashamed of you, George. And we don’t want their money.’

‘Certainly not.’

‘Do they live in Australia?’

‘None of them live in Australia. They all live here, in

England. When they do invite us to visit them next, we will go together, so that you may see their grandeur.'

'Perhaps, dear, they may help the boys when the time comes.'

'The boys, I hope, will help themselves. You see, my dear, I am perfectly certain that they will not think my boys in want of any help.'

'Do they know, George, where you are, and that you are married?'

'Well, you remember that your father put a notice of the marriage in the paper. Perhaps they saw that.'

'Perhaps.'

'Nettie, my dear'—he drew her to sit upon his knee while he lay back, his head in his hands—'let us talk, not about rich cousins, but about being rich. How should you like to be rich, now?'

'I don't know. What do you call rich? Four hundred pounds a year?'

'No. Five thousand—ten thousand—a year—all to spend.'

'I can't think of so much. We could never spend so much, nor half.'

'Try to think of being so rich. Try to understand what it means to be rich. I believe that a dream of great wealth is the commonest dream of all. Did you never dream what you would do if you were rich?'

'No, I never did. It would be foolish. Father used to be fond of saying what he would do if he were rich. His thoughts ran on great houses and gardens, and a carriage. I think, too, he would like to have an office and a staff of clerks. But that's the way of a man, always to be thinking of something different. Thinking and wishing won't alter things. A woman understands what is before her, and makes the best of it. Many men, I am sure, never understand exactly what they are. My brother Horry, for instance——'

'No, my dear. Horatio Patager certainly does not yet understand himself.'

'Then, you see, it is so silly of people in our station to dream about getting rich. When a boy is made a clerk, he ought to understand, to begin with, that he can never become rich.'

'Like a Franciscan, when he assumes the triple cord, he renounces wealth. The modern Franciscan is the City clerk.'

'He must be content to live respectably and to do his duty, and to set an example of honesty and moral principle to those above him and to those beneath him in station.'

'Quite right, Nettie dear. It is only since I have known you that I have properly estimated the breadth and the depth of the influence exercised by the City clerk.'

'Father was never rich. That is certain. But we have always been most respected. Nobody can deny that.'

'Consider, my dear. Give reins to your imagination. If you were rich, you would have no anxieties. At present, your happiness depends upon my health and strength. They may fail. If you were rich, you would not think about me so much, perhaps.'

'Then I could not love you so much, dear.'

'The boys would have the best education——'

'And learn to grow up idle, and so get into mischief.'

'You would have your carriage and your servants, and a big house——'

Nettie shook her head.

'These things do not attract me. Why do you keep harping on rich people, George?'

'Partly, my dear, from a habit of curious speculation. Partly, because there seems a chance—just, just a chance—of our really becoming better off.'

'Oh! better off. That I don't say.'

'Yes, a good deal better off. It is an opening. An offer—provisional, of course—that I have had made to me, in connection with a West-End paper. If anything comes of it—why, then you would have to prepare yourself for a considerable increase to your income, madam.'

'Oh! How much?'

'Last year I made three hundred pounds. What do you say to six hundred?'

'George! It is impossible! Six hundred?'

'Impossible, my dear, not impossible. To the journalist, as to the engineer, nothing is impossible. We do not know the word. But we must consider before we make a bid for

this vast income. Being poor, my dear, has many advantages. I never knew how good a thing it is to be poor until—until I married you, Nettie dear.'

'Not that we are poor at all, George. And now come to supper.'

After supper, George again began to talk about riches and poverty. He persisted in regarding himself and his wife as poor people, though they had quite the nicest house in Daffodil Road, with every room furnished and paid for, and nothing on the hire system; and though his wife had nearly a hundred pounds of her own, all saved since her marriage, and standing to her name in the Post Office Savings Bank.

'You see,' he said, 'how simple is our life—how few are our wants as we live now. If we had more money, the wants would increase, the simplicity would vanish.'

'I am sure,' his wife replied, 'that we have everything we want. We ought to be very happy, George dear, and I am too.' She laid her hand upon his arm fondly. 'Very happy, my dear, thanks to you. Who could be unhappy with such a husband?'

He kissed her. Then he filled and lit his pipe.

'Let us, however, consider farther,' George continued. 'We occupy, at present, an obscure station, and have few responsibilities. No one expects anything of us: we have few opportunities of cheating our employers, or sweating our servants. My employer, for instance, the Proprietor of the *Clerkland Observer* (with which is incorporated the *Arcadian Gazette*) can, and does, sweat me. I remark the fact without rancour. The practice hurts me little: it keeps me poor, in constant occupation, and in good training. It hurts the Proprietor more than it hurts me. It damages and weakens, you see, his moral fibre. I watch it weakening. It makes the downward slope easier for his poor feet. I look to see him presently accelerate the pace, and—swish!—glide swiftly out of sight into the chasm below.'

'No one talks like you, George. No wonder the curate says you are above your station! "A remarkably well-informed man," he said to father.'

George laughed pleasantly.

'No man, my dear, can be above his station. He may be—he often is—below it. Sometimes I think that even the

curata. . . . But no. Any man may adorn his station, but he cannot rise above it. To return. Consider another point. We have two boys, the image, I am pleased to think, of their mother. These boys, when they grow up, will, perhaps, begin to form and to nourish ambitions—even in this suburb ambitions may spring in the youthful heart. It is not given to every man to become the contented clerk. Now, if that should prove happily to be the case, they would have the whole world before them. Any line of life—every line—is open to them. The son of Croesus has no such choice. His ambition may be soaring, but his field is limited. When you come to think rightly of it, to be so near the bottom, with the ladders all round you, by which you may climb to dizzy heights in any direction you please, and the lowest rungs all within easy reach and open to choice—it is glorious! It is splendid!

The wife shook her head.

‘I hope the boys will go on contented with their lot, and as happy as we’ve always been. I don’t believe in grandeur. It only leads to wild ways.’

‘Perhaps. Another reason for remaining poor. Wild ways, indeed! Wild ways! For the likes of us!’

‘And we are *not* poor, George,’ his wife insisted. ‘We are most respectable people. Father always says that ours is the one class that keeps the country honest. We do all the work, and the chiefs take all the money. Down below there is drink. Up above there is profligacy. That’s what father says. With us there is honesty, fidelity, and moral principle. We don’t cheat, like the tradesman. We don’t grind, like the capitalist. We don’t drink, like the working-man.’

‘And we don’t profligate like the House of Lords. Your father is always right, my dear Nettie. He is a most valuable member of the State. Well, folks who are—not exactly poor—like ourselves—are not introspective nor retrospective.’

‘I don’t know what it means, George; but I am glad we are not.’

‘We look not backwards or forwards. Disease, for example, we do not regard as hereditary. This saves us a great deal of trouble and anxiety. We take no precautions, yet we do not sit down in despair. For instance, there is

the hereditary disease of drink. Suppose one of our boys was to break out in that direction ?

‘I cannot suppose. It is impossible !’ the wife interposed. ‘My boys, indeed ! Your boys, George ! To take to drink ? Impossible !’

‘Quite impossible, which is the reason why I ask you to suppose it. The friends of such an one call him a toper, a drunkard, a coward, a disgrace to his family. He feels that he must fight against it—there is nothing else possible for him. If he does not, he will even lose his livelihood. Now, if he were a rich man, he would sit down : he would say, “I am a victim of heredity. There is no use in struggling.”’

‘Then he would be a fool for his pains. But nobody could be such a fool as that.’

‘I dare say he would. A wiser plan would have been to avert the disease by ordinary precautions. Physicians are agreed, I believe, that disease may be more easily averted than cured. Well, my dear, we are all of us actively engaged, in the course of our lives, in manufacturing diseases, tendencies, weak places for our children and the generations to come. We are at the same time suffering the diseases which our fathers were so good as to create for us. Sometimes I think that we shall hereafter take turn about, become our own grandsons, and so inherit our own creations.’

‘We know that it is not so, George,’ said his wife solemnly. ‘As the tree falls——’

‘Quite so. Well, my dear, we who live a simple life transmit a simplicity of living, a plain habit, and a healthy temperance. Some of our good friends have inherited puny bodies and tiny brains. Well, they are not conscious of their inheritance. That is a distinct gain. They can therefore go on hoping, and can go on working.’

‘They do their duty, George, in that state of life——’

‘They do, my dear ; they faithfully do. And they have their screw.’

If Nettie had any fault to find with her husband, it was that he so often interrupted these little extracts from the hymn-book and the Prayer Book which pious ladies receive as the Very Word. What more would have followed we shall never know, because at this point there was a knock at the door.

The late visitor was none other than the interesting and

zealous servant, Mavis. But he was a servant no longer. He was Mr. Mavis. As such Mrs. Humphrey shook hands with him. He stood in the doorway without saying a word, his eyes dropped.

'Well?' asked George, changing colour. 'You here again?'

'To-night, if you are ready,' he replied quietly.

'Business in Boston again? So soon?' asked the wife.

'How quick the time comes round!'

'Business it is, and in Boston, madam,' said Mr. Mavis.

'Train at ten sharp, if that suits you.'

He sat down, his hat in his hands, waiting. He was no longer the servant, which was shown by his taking a chair, but he looked like one still. One never shakes off the manners of a servant.

'I'll pack your bag, George,' said his wife, with a sigh.

'I had forgotten: I suppose it is two months since you went there last. And since it is business that pays so well, why should I grumble?'

'Since it has to be done, my dear'—George rose slowly and unwillingly—'and since it cannot be done at home, I suppose it may as well be done at Boston as anywhere else. As for paying, ask Mavis himself how well it pays. Bread and meat and drink and lodging and clothes it has been to him for five long years.'

Nettie ran away to pack the bag.

'Don't you feel like it?' asked Mavis.

'I never feel like it till you come. Damn you!'

'Then your throat begins to tickle, and your mind begins to run on whisky, and presently you begin to gasp and your throat burns——'

'Hush! it has begun——'

His wife came back, carrying the bag.

'Good-bye, George dear. Take care of yourself. I shall expect you home in three days. We have got plenty of money. Good-night, Mr. Mavis.'

'My dear'—George folded her in his arms—'let us think no more of getting rich. Let us continue in obscurity. So best. So we must.'

CHAPTER X.

MY OWN HOME.

OLD men who have risen—young men who are rising—are subject, from time to time, to a remarkable yearning after a sight of the place they knew and haunted in the days of small things. They must go back and look at the place: they must revive the old associations. We have had, for instance, recorded in the public journals, how one who rose to be a languishing nobleman from a butcher's boy could not refrain from visiting the scenes of his childhood, though the visit was likely to bring trouble upon him.

Professor John Carew, as one of the young men who are rising rapidly, was naturally impelled from time to time to arise and revisit the scenes of his childhood. There was no especial reason: the place was in no way romantic: and there were no remarkable incidents peculiar to his own childhood. Yet, once a year—or perhaps once in two years—he would go off to walk once more about the old familiar streets and roads and squares. There was the church dedicated to St. Stephen, of which his father had been vicar: he was never particularly fond of the church, and he had no great liking for church services. It is not a beautiful church, being an erection of red brick: one of those district churches of which so many have been raised within the last twenty years. He had spent many hours of tedium in that church while his father—a good man, but no orator—read his discourse. Yet he always walked down the road in which the church stood, and contemplated that monument with interest. The vicarage, next the church, was the place where he was born: the garden, that in which he had been wont to play: the road, that in which his feet first trod their hesitating footsteps. He was not a sentimental man, but he had this sentimental touch. Perhaps the thing which most attracted him was, not so much the memory of the past, as the contrast between his first beginning and the splendid future which now seemed stretching out before him. This Church of St. Stephen's stands in Daffodil Road. John Carew is as much a native of the quarter as Nettie or Victoria Patager.

Therefore, when on this particular afternoon in June he walked about the place, everything was familiar to him. He remembered a time when the whole world to him consisted entirely of roads planted with trees and behind the trees little houses all alike, or nearly alike. Later on, the whole world consisted of men and women living in a condition of chronic tightness, the matrons managing with the greatest craft and skill, the boys and girls always longing for what they could not get. There is nothing in the world so stimulating to some minds as the present contemplation, or the past memory, of domestic tightness. On the other hand, to some minds nothing may prove more narrowing and enslaving. John Carew remembered how he had very early resolved upon getting clear—somehow—of domestic tightness. It made him angry to see his mother at work every day and all day long, sewing, darning, contriving, arranging: she had no independent life at all: no woman with her income and her family ever has. Well, he would fight his way out of it—somehow.

The place was so familiar to him. He recalled the prim and precise clerk, who lived in this house; the clerk with all the importance of the Senior Partner, who lived in that; the clerk of a financier, who talked of millions. He remembered them all: so regular at church, so narrow in their ideas, so proper in their conduct, so solemnly commonplace in their language, so limited in their ambitions. He remembered, besides, the sons of these worthy citizens: why, from the earliest he had felt that he belonged to higher levels than they could possibly reach, though at the outset they were all poor together. For such a boy as John Carew the ladders of ambition have been planted. Once the lad has his foot on the first rung, everything may be achieved.

John Carew loitered along the road, thinking of these early days when every step was hidden in mist and cloud, though the mists and clouds showed golden in the sunshine. The young man newly admitted into the ranks of the successful, the parvenu among scholars, looks back upon such a time with self-congratulation. When he is older he will think of it with wonder, that he should have been taken from the herd and all the rest be left behind; and with sorrow, that the joy of hope—the first budding of the

timid, half-expressed hope—is so far behind. Presently, John Carew began to think of a family he had once known. Thus, we first think of the species and then select the individual: we first gaze upon the crowd and then pick out one to represent the whole. The head of this family, he remembered, was a clerk and a person of great dignity: he was one of the churchwardens of St. Stephen's. His household consisted of his wife, two sons and two daughters. The boys, he was quite certain, were by this time in the City: they were *urbi ascripti*: long since they had found their desks: they were now, perhaps, making their hundred pounds a year, or even more. Where were the girls? The elder always interested him, because she had large dark-blue eyes which looked full of deep, deep thoughts, too wise for speech, too spiritual for common man. Nay, there was a time even when. . . . But happily that business went but very little way. No doubt a mind of commonplace with eyes of romance. How should a girl belonging to such a house be anything but commonplace? What had become of Nettie? There was a younger sister—Victoria—but he remembered less of her. She was four years younger than Nettie. Yes, Nettie must be twenty-four—about two years younger than himself. Very likely she was married: the people in these parts marry early: perhaps she had gone away—yet those people do not care about going away: they are attached to their old quarters.

He lifted his head at this moment and looked around. Heavens! The oddest, most remarkable coincidence ever heard of! For at an open window, which served as a frame for a portrait, he saw the very girl of whom he was thinking. Five years, at least, since last he saw her. He knew her at once: it was Nettie Patager. She was bending over something—in fact, the cradle. He stopped: he looked: he opened the gate and stepped into the little front garden. She turned her head. Yes! Nettie. There was no mistaking the deep-blue eyes. She saw him, and cried out with wonder, and ran to open the door.

'Why, it's never John Carew, is it? Oh, do come in, John Carew! We haven't seen you for ever so long, not since your father went away. Do come in!'

She gave him both her hands, and would willingly have kissed him had it been proper.

'Nettie, of course I knew you at once. And is this your house—and your own?'

He looked at the cradle and its occupant.

'It is my own house—all my own. Isn't it a nice house? And my own baby. I've got another little boy, two years old. But he's gone out with the girl in his perambulator, bless him!'

'And what is your new married name, Nettie?'

'My new name? I've had it for more than three years. It's Humphrey. I think it a very pretty name. George Humphrey is my husband's name.'

'I do not seem to remember the name, in the old time. Perhaps he belonged to one of the Chapel folk.'

'Oh no, always a Churchman. But George is a new-comer. He doesn't belong to the place. He only came to live here about three years and a half ago. My husband is an Australian. He comes from near Melbourne. Fancy my marrying an Australian! Who ever would have thought of such a thing?'

'Why not, Nettie, if he is the man of your choice?'

'Of course he is the man of my choice. He isn't in the City, you know, which went against him at first, because we are all City people here, and we like the old ways best. Father thinks there is no safety out of the City. A young man should get a berth in a good old House, he says, and stick to it. That's his idea. Well, there is truth in it, too. What father says is always sensible. So when George came to the house first, he didn't get much encouragement, and was rather looked down upon, because he is only a journalist, you see. And a City clerk in a good House naturally looks down upon a journalist.'

'Naturally.' John Carew sat down and listened. His old friend talked along just as she had always done, quickly—as all London girls talk—lifting her eyes, those wonderful great eyes, deep and full, charged with mystery and unknown depths of thought. 'Quite naturally, Nettie.'

'Yes. But George bore up. He has the temper of an angel, my husband. Nobody ever saw him put out. When my brother, Horatio—you remember Horatio?—was rude to him, and chaffed him about his flimsy and his penny-a-line, he only laughed. By degrees father came round a bit. He could see that George was a steady young man,

and went off to business at regular hours. Then it was found out that he was making a good income—more than three pounds a week: and somebody told father that there are journalists who make as much as eight or ten pounds a week. So father made no further opposition. Besides, it was too late, because I was bent upon it by then, whatever anybody said. And so we were married at a registrar's, just to show our determination. But we went to Church afterwards, of course.'

'That was a happy time, was it not?'

'Oh!' She clasped her hands. 'But it's been a happier time since then.' She sighed. 'I often think I'm not sufficiently grateful. None of us are. Yet I've got the best husband in the world, and two of the loveliest children you ever saw, and a nice house, and a good income to spend. What more can a woman desire?'

'I think there is not much more to be got. Love, plenty, youth, health, and strong children. Do you know, Nettie, you have got everything that the world can give you?'

She laughed contentedly. Fancy one woman—and that woman under five-and-twenty—able to absorb all that the world has to give! Rightly is woman called receptive.

'I ought to be happy. I am happy, John.'

'And I am very glad, indeed, to see my old friend in such good case.'

'But what are you doing, John?'

'I have left Cambridge. I am a Professor.'

'Oh! A teacher in a school? Well, John, I am glad you are not too grand for us.'

He laughed too. It is well to have one's position clearly understood.

Then she went back to her husband again, as a woman, selfish in her own happiness, naturally does. Nettie could talk about George and the children all day long, and dream about them all the night, and never feel the least desire to change the subject.

'George is not a common journalist,' she continued. 'You must not think that. Once there was a journalist who took a house next door to us. I believe that it was his example which set father against the profession. The beer that used to go into that house—at all hours, too! Oh! He was a disgrace to the Road. Everybody was

glad when he went away, though sorry for the poor wife to have her furniture seized for the rent. My husband is not like that man at all. To begin with, he has been a most wonderful traveller: he has been all round the world—think of that! And he knows French and German: he can quote Latin and Greek: and look at all his books!’

John Carew got up instantly, and began to examine the books. A very good collection, so far as five or six hundred volumes go. This man knew what reading meant.

‘And you may start any subject you please, and you will find that he knows all about it.’ John began to think that the man must be of the self-made, self-assertive, ostentatiously superior kind. ‘Sometimes the Curate looks in of an evening, and they argue. The Curate always pretends to have got the best of it. But I know. It’s my husband’s kindness. And as for writing, why, he can write anything. He writes the leaders every week in the *Clerkland Observer*: he sends descriptive articles to the magazines, and they are taken: he can write poetry: he can write tales, too. Once he wrote a most beautiful story, all about a man who was in love with a girl. But he found out that he had an hereditary disease; and he had to behave cruel to her, so as to break it off without her being blamed. And so he went away——’

‘And died of a broken heart?’

‘No. In the story he went to live among poor people, and married a poor girl, and she made him happy in spite of the hereditary disease. When he is hard up for a subject, he opens his note-book, and writes out an account of some island he has been to, and sends that to a journal. As for money, we are getting on famously. We have everything we want; and we are saving, I can tell you. There’s baby waking up!’

In fact, the youthful Humphrey gave the usual evidence of a return to consciousness. His mother shook him up, after the manner of the fond mother, and administered the bottle.

‘It’s half-past twelve,’ Nettie went on. ‘This is one of the days when my husband comes home to dinner. He will be home by one. Will you stay and have some dinner with us? Do, John, for old times’ sake! There’s plenty and to spare. If there is one thing that we are extravagant in, it’s

housekeeping. Mother holds up her hands, only to think of the butcher's bill. But then, I tell her, she hasn't got a man to provide a dinner for. What does she want with a big butcher's bill? When we girls were at home, it was a bloater one day and an egg another day, or a slice of bacon, or a tin of Australian tongue, cold—and good enough, too. And even father is content with a shilling for his dinner: says that to spend more than a shilling on a meal is sinful waste and gluttony, in one who is a clerk. But George is that kind of man who is not happy if there is not plenty. It's the Australian in him, I suppose. So it's only the prime joints that content him; and—I will say this for him—he has as noble an appetite as ever blessed a man. Then you will stay, John? It's a lovely steak—a picture—it is indeed. I am going to see about it at once. That's kind now—you will stay.'

She left the baby under his eye, and ran away. Presently he began to discover the fragrance of this unrivalled steak as it hissed under the influence of the clear fire in the kitchen below. Nettie was not too proud, he observed, to assist in cooking her husband's dinner. By this time he had made up his mind concerning this unique specimen of the Journalist—the complete and Perfect Journalist. He was young, pasty-faced, undersized, conceited, self-assertive, and underbred. He thought of the poor girl's enthusiasm with a kind of pity. How good for a woman thus to nourish illusions concerning her husband! Since one cannot get rid of a husband, better never to know or suspect the truth about him. John knew the sheet, the *Clerkland Observer*. You see, it existed in the time of his residence. He remembered the character of its leading articles, and drew an inference—hasty and without sufficient foundation—as to the kind of man who would write those articles. Past-faced, undersized, underbred, self-taught, and conceited. And Nettie believed that he was a great scholar and a great genius!

The clock on the mantelshelf struck one. Precisely to the moment John heard a manly footstep outside. Then a rushing footstep—it was the wife flying upstairs to greet her husband.

'George, we have got a visitor—an old friend. Come in—'

The door opened and the Perfect Journalist appeared, John Carew caught his breath with astonishment. Pasty-faced? Undersized?

Why, the man was a giant—tall, broad, rosy-cheeked, handsome as Phœbus Apollo. Underbred?

He advanced with the best air in the world.

‘Any old friend of my wife is welcome,’ he said, holding out an immense paw.

‘This is John Carew, my dear,’ said his wife. ‘He was son of our last vicar. Father was churchwarden. We often used to go to the vicarage to tea in the old days.’

‘Well, Mr. Carew,’ said the husband, ‘I am glad to see you.’

‘The vicar went away to another church——’

‘My father took a country living,’ John explained. He could not take his eyes off this man, so big, so handsome, so totally unexpected. Besides, he had an uneasy feeling that——

‘—And so we have never met until to-day, when John saw me by accident.’

‘I have been at school and at Cambridge,’ John explained again. ‘When one gets among other sets and in other places——’ The uneasiness grew stronger.

‘Yes,’ said the Journalist. ‘What was your College?’

‘Christ’s.’

He was now quite sure that he had seen that face before, somewhere.

‘Ah!’ He changed colour slightly. ‘What year did you go up?’

‘In eighty-four.’

When John went away, he thought it was rather odd that an Australian journalist should ask these questions. When one young man puts them to another, it generally argues some acquaintance with the University.

‘Eighty-four. Oh! Yes. Eighty-four. That was after——’ He checked himself.

Then they went down to dinner. John observed, first, that husband and wife drank water; that is not so unusual in these days: he next remarked that there was an observance of dinner forms, simple enough, but not customary in households of Arcadia or Clerkland, where there is only one real dinner a week. The napkins, the table linen, the serving

of the dinner by the single maid, showed an appreciation of dinner as a ceremony or act of worship.

'George is particular about his dinner,' said his wife. 'At home we used to have it pretty much anyhow, except on Sundays. George likes it properly laid and served. Well—I must say that he has made me like it so, though mother would never give in to it.'

George volunteered no explanation of this singular taste. By this time, however, John had discovered that the man was a gentleman. Clearly, a gentleman. At every point of him, a gentleman. How came such a man as this to be so low down in the world?—assistant-editor to a little suburban local paper, living by chance contributions here and there.

'I hear that you are an Australian, Mr. Humphrey,' he said presently.

'An Australian,' replied his host shortly, and in a voice which encouraged no more inquiry in that direction.

Then they began to talk about the topics of the day. This Australian talked well: there was not the least self-assertion: he was not conceited: he was not half informed: and he did not talk the day before yesterday's leading article of his favourite paper. Now, if one listens in a suburban railway carriage where the people talk to each other, you will observe, provided you are properly posted in the literature of the *Ephemerides*, that the opinions exchanged, offered or confirmed on the subjects of the day are those of the day before yesterday's *Standard* or the day before yesterday's *Daily News*, according to the politics of the speaker. This man, because he was an Australian, probably, talked as one who has taken the trouble to get at the facts from his newspaper and to draw the deductions for himself.

When the early dinner was finished, John Carew felt that he had met an intellectual equal, and, in knowledge of men and manners, a superior. But the College Don rarely has an opportunity of acquiring much knowledge of men and manners.

'Will you come to see me?' he said. 'I live in chambers. If you would dine with me at the Savile——'

'Thank you very much,' Mr. Humphrey replied. 'But I do not belong to Club life or to West-End life at all.'

'That is the reason——'

'Pardon me. You are very kind—but I live here,' he spoke decisively. 'You, who know this part of the world—'

'Yes, yes'—for the speaker left the sentence unfinished—'I know—well. But if Nettie—forgive me, we always used to call each other and to think of each other by our Christian names—and you would come to my chambers alone, some evening—if it is only to carry on this talk—'

'Do, George,' said his wife. 'We go out so seldom—never anywhere, except to mother's. I should like to go, and John is such an old friend!'

'Very well, my dear, if you like it. Mr. Carew, one condition, please. We will gladly accept your invitation—if you will allow us to find you alone.'

John Carew went home thoughtful. To begin with, here was a very remarkable man—in any circle he would be remarkable: he was nothing but a small suburban journalist. Now, such a man generally begins with being a reporter: he writes shorthand: he attends local functions, inquests—he is great in inquests: he portrays the local news: he is acquainted with all the local tradesmen: he is influential in getting advertisements: but he is not a gentleman, a traveller, and a scholar.

Had he done something, to get so low down?

On the other hand, why should he do anything? Suppose, which was probable, that he had come over here to seek his fortune and had been compelled by poverty to take what he could get? He might very well not be eager to be introduced to the literary circle of the Savile Club as the assistant-editor of a suburban paper. A man must get up the ladder somehow or other; there is no dishonour in any honest way: but some of the lower rungs are rather better, to look at, than others.

Nettie had done very well. Her large and lustrous eyes—he remembered them when she was only a little girl—had brought to her feet that Prince of whom every girl dreams but few girls get—a man strong, capable, well-taught, well-bred, affectionate and constant. Happy Nettie! Thrice happy Nettie!

But—after all—how came such a man in such a place?

He went to bed that night haunted with a sense of incongruity. What had such a man to do in such a place? What brought him there? And he remembered the man's

face—very odd thing : he remembered the face quite well—that is, part of the face, not all of it—quite well and clearly he remembered it. Where had he seen it? It was one of those horrid half-memories which disturb and irritate one, because the other half will not come back. He tried, but in vain, to remember the voice, the shoulders, the big burly form, the great hands, the whole appearance of the man. He could not. It was only the face that seemed to haunt him.

A trick of the brain! How should he ever forget this splendid man if he had ever met him? It was impossible. One might as well try to forget some hero of romance : one might as well forget Don Quixote—Colonel Newcome—She. A trick of the brain—nothing but a trick of the brain!

CHAPTER XI.

THE RECLUSE.

THE visit to John Carew's room was duly made, and the condition observed. No one except the tenant of the rooms was there to meet this suburban journalist of retiring disposition.

Everybody knows the kind of nest—luxurious, well furnished, æsthetic to a certain point, but with a kind of severity—which the young Cambridge Don makes for himself and transports with him when he leaves his College. The rooms were a flat—young men who are Professors no longer live in grimy chambers. There were two sitting-rooms, both of them filled with books, but one having its books only half-way up the wall, so as to leave space for engravings hanging above. Great feeling was displayed in the selection of chairs : in such rooms there should be no two exactly alike ; as there are diversities in length of limb, so should there be diversities in depth and width and height of the chairs. In a more advanced state of civilization these points will be observed, even in dining-rooms. There was no foolishness of fashion : smaller people may put up peacock's feathers one year, and blue china the next ; a young Professor must rise to the level that is above

fashion, and remain there. There were also a good many 'nice things,' chiefly gathered round about the shores of the Mediterranean or the sandy banks of the Upper Nile.

The Professor observed when George Humphrey came into the room that he looked about him with the eyes of one who knows such rooms, and while Nettie cried out for the beauty of the furniture, he began to go round among the book-shelves, reading the titles and taking out the volumes to look at the edition or the binding, or to refresh his eyes with the mere sight of the text, like one to the manner born. John Carew was not only curious about this remarkable journalist, but he was also by nature observant.

'This fellow,' he thought, 'is not self-made, whatever else he is. That is abundantly clear; no self-made man could handle a book like that.'

An observation which shows that the young Professor may yet become a novelist. Because, you see, the self-made man reveals his selfish training, to those who have eyes to see, by his manner of handling the tools of training. What is the difference? It is hard to say. The man who has educated himself knows the value of books as much as the man who 'makes' himself knows the value of money: he respects them and loves them as much as one who has been schooled and taught from childhood up; yet he cannot handle them with the same appearance of affection. It is their contents that he values. He is as one who loves humanity for its virtues and its possibilities: the scholar is as one who loves humanity for the same reason, but delights to see his humans clothed daintily and behaving with grace. Now, this Australian journalist showed the scholar's handling.

They talked of many things. Their talk lasted till ten at night. John Carew discovered that of quite recent books his new acquaintance knew nothing at all; but of older books, say six years old at least, he knew and had read everything that men do read and talk about—the books of Darwin—of Herbert Spencer—the novels down to the year 1885 or thereabouts—the poets down to that year—there has not been much poetry since. It was as if for some reason or other he had ceased to read about that year.

'I have read nothing of late,' said George, when he had betrayed complete ignorance of what had recently been

written and said upon a certain subject. 'It is now nearly six years since I quite left off reading.'

'Really? Quite left off reading?'

'I was travelling about the world, sailing among the islands of the Pacific, and so was out of the way of books. When the wander years were over, and there was no more money left, one had to get work somehow—any work that offered. The work that came to me was—what you know. There are no libraries, no new books, no new magazines, and nobody to talk about books in my quarter.'

'I should have thought that you would have returned with an insatiable thirst for books.'

'No. When you have to cadge around for the day's dinner, there is not much thirst left for anything else. Besides, one easily forgets those tastes; one grows lethargic: in your company some of the old enthusiasms may flash up. Mostly, however, they are dead and gone.'

He spoke with a touch of sadness in his voice.

'They can easily be revived,' said the Professor. 'Surely, surely, a year or two of uncongenial work cannot have destroyed the fine taste, the scholarly instincts, the scholarship itself. Why, you betray these things in every word you utter!'

'Only the smouldering fires—they are nearly destroyed.'

'Then leave these lower levels and let those fires revive.'

Nettie heard this talk with bewilderment. She understood in a vague way that John Carew, of whose actual position she had but vague ideas, was urging her husband to leave low levels—low levels?—and go up higher.

'I must stay where I am,' said George. 'It is the compulsion of necessity—*force majeure*—the hand of Fate.'

'No, no; there can be no such compulsion,' the Professor persisted. 'A man like you can command better work. It is a shame that you should be giving yourself away to a trumpery local rag. You ought to be on the staff of a great paper. A man with so much knowledge of men and manners, books and history, would be invaluable. You ought to be making your thousand a year at least.'

'Oh, George!' said his wife. 'A thousand a year?'

'You cannot sit down contented with your present work.'

'I don't know,' George replied. 'Perhaps I can do no

better. Being where I am, and making enough for actual wants, why should I worry?"

'Oh! but to stick down there——'

'It seems rather cowardly, doesn't it? But I don't know. You see, in our fortunate quarter a certain happiness, not of a very high standard, reigns in all hearts. If I should emerge, we might lose this happiness.'

The Professor laughed scornfully.

'Shall we exchange the substance for the shadow?' George went on. 'In the higher levels there is no contentment, but every man fighting for more and the standard going up, and up, until nothing less than the best of everything satisfies anybody.'

'You are not serious?'

'I am serious in this: that I mean to remain where I am. As for getting better work, that may come subject to the condition of remaining where I am. You don't wish to leave your native quarter, Nettie? We will stay where we are—alone, and contented with our own company.'

'I would rather stay where we are,' said Nettie. 'But I should like you to get work better suited to your genius, George. And I should like to see a little more of the world than we do.'

The Professor clearly perceived that, for some reason or other, this man intended to remain in obscurity. I regret to say that, like certain members of Nettie's family, he began to suspect some reason of the baser kind for this desire. It was absurd that a man still under thirty—so well educated, so well read, apparently so well bred—should desire the obscurity of such a life. Well, for Nettie's sake, he hoped that it was nothing shameful that remained to be found out.

When the visitors went away, John Carew began to consider what, if anything, could be done for this man. Those who write for daily papers must be on the spot—in the office—every day: they must see and consult the Editor. But there are certain weekly papers where this is not necessary. Many men write for these papers from the country. He knew a certain Editor. To him he confided the fact that he had found that rare creature, the retreating modest genius who desires nothing but to hide his head away from the haunts of men. There have been known

such cases. The Editor, interested, undertook to consider anything that this unknown genius should send him. Then John Carew went again to Daffodil Road, and had another talk.

'Think,' he said. 'No one asks you to stir from this hermitage. No one will want to see you—all you have to do is to furnish an article in the style suited to the paper on a subject that may interest the readers. Will you try? It is certainly a long step above the local paper.'

George hesitated.

'I have ventured to interfere with your affairs,' said John, 'for the sake of my old friendship with your wife. That is my only excuse. I see that you desire, for reasons of your own, to remain in obscurity. I do not ask those reasons—only for your wife's sake—'

'You are very good. Yes—thank you—I will have a shot at this paper. If I succeed, I am not bound or tied down by any times or hours?'

'None. But there is a good deal of work to be got on such a paper—review work, politics, social articles. You might succeed in getting so firm a footing on the paper that the Editor would look for you as a regular contributor.'

A week later George had the pleasure of seeing a paper by himself occupying a place of honour in small print and in the middle. In the course of the next two months he contributed half a dozen papers. Then, owing to certain events which happened unexpectedly, this profitable and honourable connection was broken off altogether, and now I do not think it will ever be resumed.

The two men saw a great deal of each other during this season. They became as intimate as is possible where one man keeps an obstinate silence about his own people and his early history. One resents this reticence—except, perhaps, in the case of a man whose people have been hanged, or who has himself spent a term of years at Dartmoor. We do not ask for confidence exactly; but we do not like concealment. Such men may make plenty of acquaintances; but of friends, few. Besides, why hide the fact of poor relations? They are a nuisance to the man himself, particularly if they want to borrow his money or be asked to his dinners; but they are not a nuisance to his friends. Not at all. His friends rather like to tell how the man has one

cousin who keeps a lodging-house, and another who is matron at a school. George Humphrey said nothing more about either himself or his antecedents. He was an Australian, from Melbourne—so his wife said: he had travelled and spent all his money, and so was obliged to do what work he could get—so he himself had confessed. What John Carew himself perceived in addition to this was, that he was a man of culture, education, and good breeding. In accepting his journalistic work, in marrying Nettie Patager, he had come down in the world. Had he done something? Had he gone under because he must? Perhaps. Poor Nettie! Best not to inquire further, lest ugly things should be discovered and present happiness be destroyed.

In this way May passed into June, June into July, and the two months' interval of virtue and temperance drew towards its close.

'If you will come to-morrow evening,' said the Professor one night, 'I will find the book and look out the passage for you; I think it will clear up the point.'

'To-morrow will do perfectly well,' said George. 'I will turn up about eight o'clock.'

'My dear,' said Nettie. 'Pray do not make any engagements after to-morrow. Remember, it is your Boston week.'

George changed colour. He grew red, and then pale.

'I had almost forgotten,' he said. 'Well, for to-morrow evening, at least, I am free. The day after I may have to go away on business.'

'He has business that takes him to Boston once every two months.'

'Boston?' asked the Professor. 'I thought that Boston was extinct, dead and gone—I had an idea that it died in giving birth to the new Boston. There can be but one Boston.'

'Oh!' said George, 'the old Boston lives still. There is a good deal of business in a quiet way at Boston. Mine is business which, as it happens, no one can manage except myself. I don't like it—I find it a great nuisance going away for two or three days. It is an interruption. Still, if it brings in money— And we cannot afford to give up regular work, can we, Nettie?'

'I hate it,' said his wife. 'It takes him away from me: it worries him beforehand: I can see him thinking about it:

he gets fidgety sometimes, days before the time : and sometimes he comes back looking so pale and shaky that it is evident how hard they work him. I believe he works all day and all night.'

'All night, sometimes,' said George, with a smile.

'Can't you give it up?' said the Professor. 'Will not the new work take its place?'

'I cannot possibly give it up. I am under no positive engagement ; but yet I must not give it up. It is, I confess, a great trouble and interruption, and the work—the work—is uncongenial—and in many ways it is . . . sometimes——' He lost command of himself for the moment. 'It is intolerable ; but it can't be given up.'

His face clouded over. Conversation was stopped. The Professor said 'Good-night.'

'George dear'—Nettie twined her hands round his arm—'you were angry to-night about this Boston business. Why do you let it worry you? Give it up, dear—we can make plenty of money without it. Oh ! I have always hated it more and more, and now I can't bear to see you going off with that horrid man, looking miserable when you start, and coming home pale and shaken. I am always thinking about it. Can't you give it up?'

'No, dear, I can never give it up. Never—now. I might, perhaps, if I had had the courage five years ago.' He dropped his voice. 'But now—never, my dear. Let us make the best of it.'

'And with such a man ! I hate the sight of Mr. Mavis. He looks like a worm, with his white smooth face and his down-dropped eyes. A man who cannot even look you in the face. Give it up, dear. Think of what John Carew keeps on saying, and give it up.'

He kissed her sadly ; but made no reply.

'Business in Boston !' said John Carew to himself on the way home. 'Business in Boston every two months, for a literary man—wonderful ! Business which makes him wretched before, and shaky after it. Business which he cannot possibly give up. Now, if I were in the Gaboriau line, I would go to Boston and find out what could be the business which takes a journalist there once in two months. This is the secret of Mr. George Humphrey's retreat to the back seat of suburban journalism. This is the skeleton in

the cupboard. Business in Boston—why does he say Boston? I don't believe he goes to Boston. Yet business of some kind—of a regular kind—of an unpleasant kind—and of a kind which must be done. I think it would not be difficult to find out where his business lies, and of what kind it is. Any man may be watched—such a big man would find it very difficult to escape detection. Yet—no, Nettie—though I should like to discover the mystery, for your sake, my old friend—I will not seek to disturb your happiness.'

CHAPTER XII.

HE IS ALIVE.

In the morning, among the letters, John Carew found on his table one from Elinor Thanet. It reminded him of a task laid upon him, in which he had as yet taken no steps at all. In fact, it was a task which he proposed to shirk, because he had no great desire that the young lady's lost lover should be traced. To find him might mean the awakening of old emotions. He would rather wait, watch, and be patient until the day, now certainly not far distant, when she should herself own that the time had come when she might consider herself free.

The letter gave him a disagreeable reminder of neglected duty.

'MY DEAR FRIEND (she wrote),

'I once asked you to help me in finding that long-lost lover of mine. I do not know if you have made any attempt, or if you have met with any success in your search. But you would have told me if you had. Now I have something for you to go upon. He is in this country. He has quite lately been at Brighton: he may be there now. He was at Brighton, in fact, three days ago. A letter has been received from him, in his own handwriting, which is unmistakable. I enclose a copy of it. The cheque which it enclosed has been honoured, as he directs, by his agents. We have all felt the greatest relief to learn that George is really living. We now hope to find out very soon where he

is, and why he went away, and what he has been doing all this time. "The Mystery of George Atheling" might be a title for a shilling shocker. I am now wiser than I was when he deserted me. Things which would have then appeared to my inexperienced eyes impossible, now seem probable, because they are common. I believe, indeed, that he left me because he had fallen in love with somebody else. Further than this I cannot get. For if he had married that other girl, he would have wanted money to maintain her. But he has drawn no money for three years. All his money has been accumulating. This cheque is the only one that has been drawn: it is for a large amount; but then, I suppose, it represents the expenditure of three years. I put all kinds of suppositions before myself. I suppose that he may have been in some madhouse, or he may have been wandering in some wild and distant country; but I cannot tell what to think. Give me, if you can, a little of your thought. Advise me. And find my old friend for me.

'Yours very sincerely,

'ELINOR.'

John Carew read this letter with satisfaction. She had no longer any love for this old friend of hers. That was plain. Well, what was he to do?

The letter enclosed was very plain and simple:

'GENTLEMEN,

'Will you pay to the account of Mr. Joseph Mavis, Union Bank of London, Tottenham Branch, the sum of five thousand- pounds, for which I enclose a cheque on my own bank?

'Yours very truly,

'G. H. ATHELING.'

The letter was, of course, only a copy. The address given was at a Brighton hotel, and not one of the best. And though the letter was dated three or four days back, the cheque was dated at the end of May.

He began the search at once. First, he went to the lawyers—Mr. Atheling's agents. He found that they had carried out the instructions. The money had been paid to the account of one Joseph Mavis, at Tottenham.

'Who is Joseph Mavis?' asked the Professor.

'He is described as a gentleman living in the neighbourhood.'

'It seems very mysterious. Have you sent down to Brighton?'

'We have written, but have as yet received no answer.'

'Should you feel justified in advertising for Mr. Atheling?'

The lawyer hesitated.

'It is doubtful, as yet, whether we should. Let us first wait for the answer to our letter. We wrote to ask for an appointment.'

'You ought to have had an answer before this. Stay, it is now half past ten. I will catch the next train to Brighton, and will go myself for an answer.'

The hotel named in the letter was one of those small places in the upper and less attractive parts of the town, called Somebody's Arms. A house of call for local tradesmen, rather than a place for a gentleman to put up. John Carew went in and asked for Mr. Atheling. There was no one of that name in the hotel. A letter for a gentleman of that name was waiting in the rack.

'But,' said John, 'we have a letter from Mr. George Atheling giving the address of this hotel.'

This fact nobody ventured to explain.

'Has anybody at all been staying here lately?'

'There was a gentleman,' said the chambermaid—'he was here a week, and went away three days ago. Mr. Mavis, his name was.'

'Mr. Joseph Mavis?'

'I don't know, sir. He did not leave his Christian name.'

This was an important fact, however. No Atheling had been there at all. But one Mavis had; and Mavis, therefore, to whom the money was payable, had posted, and probably dated, the letter of instructions. Atheling, meantime, who had drawn the cheque two months before, was not with him. Yet the letter of instructions addressed at this hotel was dated three days before.

John Carew came back to town with this news.

'Now,' he said, summing up, 'this man writes a letter—the handwriting is, you say, undoubtedly his own. Another

man puts an address and a date to it. The address is false, and so is the date, because the cheque is dated two months before. Where is the man who wrote the letter and drew the cheque? Why was the false address given? Who and what is the man named Mavis?

'That we can find out very easily, I take it.'

'Have we not gone far enough to advertise? There is nothing like an advertisement. Advertise in all the papers simultaneously. Do this first, while you go on finding out who this man Mavis is. Are there any distinctive features by which Atheling can be recognised?'

'Well, yes; he is the kind of man who could be described so that recognition would be certain.'

'Let us offer a reward, then—a good big reward—a hundred pounds reward—for such information as will lead to his discovery. The papers are sure to take it up: within four-and-twenty hours the whole country will be on the look-out for the man.'

This arranged, John Carew could do no more. He wrote to Elinor and reported what he had done.

It was by this time evening, and his friend, George Humphrey, was to call in an hour or two. He took a hasty dinner at the Club and hurried back to his rooms.

The talk flagged. George Humphrey was gloomy; the other man was occupied with the difficulties of the situation.

'I must tell you,' he said at last. 'I can think of nothing else.'

'What is it?'

'I am trying to discover a man who has vanished; and I fear there has been villainy.'

'A man who has vanished? Who is the man?'

'He is a man; his name matters nothing, yet it will be in all the papers to-morrow. His name is Atheling—George Atheling.'

He was so much interested in his story that he did not observe the sudden change in his companion's face.

'Atheling,' George repeated.

'This is the story. He was engaged to a young lady—then almost a girl. He was a wealthy man. He had everything that any man can hope to have. He was young,

rich, healthy, strong, highly cultivated, and with a great future before him. Yet he disappeared suddenly.'

'Why?'

'Nobody knows.'

'Nobody? Did not the girl herself ever tell why he went away?'

'She never knew: she could not so much as guess. He vanished, that is all we know. It was discovered that two years later he drew some money. Then he vanished again, and this time altogether.'

'Were not any of his companions found to tell where he had been?'

'No public inquiry was ever made, and no search instituted; therefore, we don't even know who his companions were.'

'But the girl: did he not write to the girl? Surely he must have written one letter—just one—only to explain. Men don't leave girls suddenly without some sort of an explanation.'

'He made none.'

'Oh!'

George looked surprised, as if he knew something. That is to say, John Carew remembered *afterwards*, too late, this look of surprise.

'It appears, you see, that the girl and her lover had some kind of a quarrel. She told him he was not himself—he was changed somehow—it may have been nothing—a fit of indigestion. She bade him go away, and not come back till he could recover his lost self. So he went. But she added, most unfortunately for herself, that she should continue to remain bound to him till he should, when returned to his right mind, release her. And she continues to consider herself bound to him to this day.'

'Oh! But this is pure absurdity.'

'As I tell her. Such, however, is the fact. Now comes the important thing. We have at last discovered that he is still alive, or that he was alive a month or two ago.'

'Indeed? How? Has he been seen?'

'No. His lawyer, however, received, two or three days ago, a letter from him.'

'From him?'

'From him. Unmistakably in his handwriting. It was

dated from a small hotel at Brighton. It contained a large cheque, and it ordered the lawyers to pay this into a certain account.'

'Oh! this is very mysterious!' George was now entering thoroughly into the mystery of the situation. 'Very strange and interesting indeed! He wrote from Brighton?'

'Yes; but the cheque was dated some weeks before the letter. His instructions have been carried out, and the young lady has been informed that her former lover is still living. She asked me to assist in finding him. I went down to Brighton, and found that the man had never been at the hotel at all, unless he was there under a false name.'

'You are sure that there was a cheque?'

'Yes.'

'For how much?'

'It was a large cheque. For five thousand pounds.'

'For five thousand pounds? The letter and the cheque were both in his handwriting? You are sure of this?'

'The lawyers were quite sure upon the point. What do you think? That a crime of some kind has been committed?'

'A crime—of some kind,' he replied.

He shivered: he turned pale: he remained in silence for awhile.

The other man thought he was turning the problem over in his own mind.

'I suppose,' he said, 'that there will now be more cheques drawn, and continually more.'

'The man may spend his own money as he pleases. Can he not?'

'Certainly—oh! certainly. Well, it will last a good while; that is one comfort.'

'Yes; it will take a good many cheques to exhaust that little pile. What did you say you propose to do? You have formed some plan?'

'We must find him, wherever he is. That seems a clear duty.'

'You think so?'

'Certainly—we must find him. At present it looks as if he might be in somebody's power. He signs a cheque for a very large sum; he writes a letter which he neither addresses

nor dates. Perhaps he is all the time miserably locked up in a madhouse, in the hands of some villain ; but we know nothing. It is a mystery which must be cleared up. Remember, he is rich. Those who have him in their power may mean to keep him until they can get the last farthing out of him. He has friends who have not forgotten him, and he has heirs who are interested in seeing that his estates are not robbed. You are a man of the world, Humphrey ; can you suggest anything ?

‘ I should like to know your own ideas first.’

‘ I think we should advertise. We should advertise a description of the man as he looked when he was last seen, how he was dressed, colour of his eyes and hair, size and shape of him, any marks—and so forth.’

‘ Do you yourself know what he is like ? Have you a description of him ?’

‘ No. But the lawyer-people at the office say that they can describe him so that it would be perfectly easy to find him. They were doubtful about it at first, because, you see, it is rather an awkward thing to advertise for your clients ; but this discovery, that he has never been to Brighton at all, and that the letter was wrongly addressed and dated, has frightened them, and they now seem ready to go on until they find out. What do you think ?’

‘ I think,’ said George, rising, ‘ that you are quite certain to find out where he is if you do advertise—and that before many hours. But instead of advertising, I should, if I were you, do nothing at all. Consider : he has written a letter to his lawyer. This may prove his intention of letting it be known that he is, at least, alive. If he is a wise man, he will, from time to time, let his former friends and his agents know that he is living. But when a man voluntarily goes away and disappears, there must be reasons—good reasons. This man would seem to have drawn no money. The conclusions that may be drawn from this fact are many. One is quite clear : he does not wish his new way of life to be known. The man, you say, is a gentleman. Why not respect his wishes—certainly the harmless wishes—of this gentleman ?’

Some men might have suspected the truth. There are not so many gentlemen and scholars in the lower walks. But John Carew had so made up his mind that this man

was an Australian, that he did not suspect. What he did arrive at, however, was something very near the truth.

'Humphrey,' he said, 'you speak from your own experience. I have long suspected this. You have yourself broken with your friends in Australia. You no longer communicate with your own people. You have chosen to disappear.'

'For very good reasons, perhaps the very same reasons as those which drove that other man out of sight. Yes, you are quite right. I need not ask you to respect my secret. But, since you are willing to understand my position, can you not also understand that the other man's may be exactly the same—complicated by the addition of this great fortune, which he may be unwilling to assume again either for himself or for his family?'

'Yes, I see. I will think it over. After all, if we can only get tidings of his welfare, and assurance that he is a free agent, that should be enough.'

'I think it should be enough. A discovery might—it is conceivable—do him a very serious injury. For instance—take my case—your surmise is quite correct; I have cousins here in England, in a very good position. It would not please them to find me where and what I am—nor would it make my wife and the children, when they grow up, any the happier for knowing where they might have been—but for reasons. You know the motto of the Courtenays—*Ubi lapsus*?—very bad Latin. It should be mine. It may be Atheling's.'

'Yes. I think that we have been, perhaps, too hasty. I will try to stop that advertisement at once.'

In fact, he did try. Unfortunately, he was too late.

'Let me see you again soon. Can we meet to-morrow, or next day? In such a case as this, a third person—a totally uninterested person like yourself——'

'Yes,' said George calmly.

'—May be of the greatest service.'

'Unfortunately,' George replied, 'I am engaged for two or three days ahead. I must go out of town. I have, as you heard yesterday, business—business at Boston.'

Next day, Elinor received a letter, without any address, which bore the post-mark of 'Kensington'—a good central post-mark. She knew the writing.

‘At last!’ she cried, and tore open the letter.

‘MY DEAR ELINOR,—Five years ago I wrote a letter, in which I told you exactly the reasons why I had changed so greatly in two or three months. I did not bind you to secrecy; but so far as I have been able to learn, you have kept these reasons a secret. I expected some reply; but after waiting some time, I concluded that I should have none. As an opportunity now occurs to write to you again, and as I have learned that you are still unmarried—if that fact has any connection with me, I most earnestly beg that it may at once cease. My letter, indeed, gave you your release freely, and from that moment. I cannot believe that you could misunderstand it.

‘I remain always, with friendly and affectionate memories,

‘Your old friend,
‘G. A.’

‘At last he has written!’ said Elinor. ‘It is his handwriting—it was written yesterday. But he tells me nothing. Well, I am free. Of course, I was free before, whenever I pleased. And I think I am pleased now. I have had my freedom long enough. What does he mean about a former letter? Oh! he is mad. I believe he was mad then. I believe he has been mad ever since. George must have been locked up in some foreign madhouse.’

CHAPTER XIII.

BUSINESS AT BOSTON.

GEORGE HUMPHREY sat with his wife in the little slip of a garden behind the toy villa. It was blossoming as finely as if it belonged to a great house. Allow for certain well-defined limitations of the London air, and you may make a suburban garden bright with flowers through all the leafy months from May to October. Lilies, nasturtium, mignonne, convolvulus, green peas, scarlet runners, giant hollyhocks, sunflowers, the tobacco plant, the blue lobelia, hardy

annuals by the hundred, will adorn your narrow bit of ground.

The children were in bed : the sun had gone down : it was nearly nine o'clock, but there was still plenty of light. Husband and wife sat hand-in-hand. They were silent : their looks were melancholy : forebodings filled the mind of one : he saw that the thing, long expected, had at last arrived : his servant, who for five years had robbed him secretly, was now beginning to rob him without concealment. He knew how the letter must have been written and the cheque signed, by whose dictation and under what circumstances. Once begun, the thing would be repeated. He had known, since the experience of the voyage, that he was in the hands of a perfectly unscrupulous and calculating person. So long as this person did what he was paid to do, that mattered nothing. Not until now had he realized how completely he had fallen into the man's power. And he was coming again. That very evening he would come. At the thought of the orgie which would follow, with the companionship of this creature, this thief and rogue—his soul sank within him. One way out of it. Yet he had long forgotten the very possibility of this way.

'My dear,' said Nettie timidly, 'have you thought any more of what John Carew said? I mean, that you should give up the lower kind of work, and go in altogether for the best journalism.'

'Yes, I have thought of it, Nettie. I am always thinking of it.'

'It has made me so proud to see your papers in the *Review* every week. Even my father, who is so dead set against the profession, acknowledged that there was something to be proud of in being connected with such a paper. If you could only keep to that kind of work alone! Then I have had more talk with John Carew—all about you, dear. He says that you have seen so much of the world, and that you have had so many experiences of men and manners, that you ought to write a most splendid novel. Think of that, dear!'

'An autobiography. Yes—I might write a powerful autobiography, if I told the whole truth. But no one ever does.'

'Well, dear, why not? The children should learn to be

proud of their father. I know how clever he is. Let them know too. Let all the world know. Oh! since we have been to John Carew's chambers and talked with him, the world seems to have changed. You have changed; you seem a different man, and oh! so much greater, George, dear. Why, I can understand, now, what makes men discontented. Our young men are brought up to believe that there is nothing possible for them but to become clerks. They have no ambition. They go into the City and yet do not try to make themselves rich. Other young men—like John Carew, for instance—talk as if there was nothing in life worth anything except ambition.'

'There isn't—much.'

'And yet for three years you have been contented to sit down here among these unambitious clerks, and to toil for next to nothing for that wretched local paper. And you know the world. How could you do it? How could you be so contented? Why, George, when I knew no better I wanted no better. But you always knew, and yet you were contented. You even seemed to be happy. How could you, George? Was it because you had married me?'

'My dear, it was because I could not, anyhow, get rid of that other me—myself me. You helped me to become contented. You made me happy.'

She shook her head. What did he mean by 'that other me'?

'Give up this Boston business,' she urged again. 'Give that up, and I believe all would be right again.'

'Perhaps it would. Yet I cannot give it up.'

'I feel sure that it stands in your way. If you give it up, you might go among gentlemen again. Why are you afraid of going among gentlemen? You are a gentleman yourself—I have known it all along—you are as superior to my brothers as John Carew is. You belong to his set, not to ours. I can see it in the difference of your manners when you are with him. You are with an equal. With the men here, you cannot disguise that you are their superior. How could you ever marry me?'

He patted her cheek, but said nothing.

'George, I should like our boys to be gentlemen too, unless their mother stands in the way.'

'No, Nettie—no. It is their father.'

'They are the sons of a gentleman. Won't you give them their right place? Won't you sacrifice this—whatever it is that stands in their way—for the sake of your wife and children?'

The man sat silent. He heard another voice besides—a voice of three years ago—the voice of the Physician who warned him:

'There is one other chance. It is that for the sake of some person—out of some great affection—you may arm yourself with resolution enough to fight the thing.'

The voice spoke out quite clearly. He looked down upon his wife's comely head: he stooped and kissed it.

'I will give up the accursed thing,' he said. 'Whatever happens, I will give it up. I will go back to my old friends. Your boys, my dear, shall be gentlemen, as their father was when he began the world.'

'George! You will? You promise faithfully?'

She caught his hand and kissed it.

'I promise faithfully.' He raised his head, and saw at the head of the garden-steps the man whom he was expecting. 'I promise, my dear. I go to Boston—for the last time. I am only going now, in order to make my arrangements for winding up the business and handing it over to my successor. Then I shall come home. For the last time. You have seen Mavis for the last time.'

He kissed her and ran up the steps.

Five minutes later he was gone.

'But,' said his wife, 'it is for the last time. That dreadful man will come here no more.'

Like many men, George Humphrey's habits were such as to require the services of somebody to put his dressing-room in order, after every visit he made to that apartment. The wife ran up to perform the duty. The drawers were open, most of the contents were lying on the floor or on the single chair. George had been putting a few things in his bag.

She began to pick up the things and to put them back. In a few minutes the room was in order again. The last thing she picked up was an old overcoat which hung from the wall.

'George never wears this,' she said. 'I have never seen him put it on. It's quite an old thing, too. It only takes

up room. I will put it with the next bundle that goes. It will bring in something.'

She began to search the pockets, a precaution always observed both by those who sell their old clothes and by those who buy them. Money has been found forgotten in the pockets. I believe it is at Guy's that there lingers a traditional romance, or romantic tradition, of a student who was reduced to his last gasp, and on the point of renouncing his career, when he discovered in the left-hand pocket of a forgotten reach-me-down a whole sovereign. He remained at the Hospital and became a Baronet, his son became a Baron and his grandson is an Earl. And the romance remains for the comfort of all penniless students.

There was no money in this overcoat. It belonged to the days when George had a valet, which accounts for the fact; but in the breast-pocket there was a letter. She drew it out. The letter was in an envelope, stamped and ready to be posted. It was too dark to read the address.

Nettie carried the letter downstairs, thinking to give it to her husband in the morning. But when she had lit a candle, she read the address—'Miss Thanet.' Who was Miss Thanet?

The envelope, which had lain in that pocket for five years, showed signs of wear. The coat had been put on and thrown off a hundred times, but the letter had never been discovered. It had travelled all round the world. It had been hanging up in the dressing-room. Nettie herself had taken it down and brushed it a dozen times; but the letter lay there, undiscovered.

Nettie read the superscription once more.

I think that up to that moment she had never felt the smallest jealousy of her husband. In his actual presence it was impossible to feel jealous of him. His face, his manner, the look in his eyes, drove out jealousy. Even when her mother, or her sister Victoria, in her most spiteful mood, suggested that with a perfect stranger you never know for certain that there isn't another woman in the case, Nettie never felt the least jealous. What they said, however, of George's strange freedom from relations had sunk more deeply than she would confess. Now, therefore, when jealousy awoke full-grown in her heart, it was accompanied by curiosity. Under these influences, which caused her eyes

to glow and her lips to stiffen, she tore open the envelope and read the letter. You have read it already.

This letter she read through once, twice, three times. Jealousy sank back abashed, and cowed curiosity hung her meddlesome head. In the presence of this terrible confession both those passions slunk away and vanished. The concluding paragraph, with the signature, passed before her eyes unseen. She read nothing but the awful avowal of a confirmed and habitual drunkard.

'Oh!' she thought—if her thoughts could be put into words, a process which deprives them of swiftness, of brilliancy, of eloquence, and of persuasion—'I know all now. He goes mad for drink. This explains everything. He has run away from all his friends for the very shame of it. He lives apart from them because they won't let him live with them. And the man Mavis is nothing but his keeper, whom they pay to take care of him when he has a fit. He has one coming on now. He goes away somewhere with his man, and stays until the fit is over. Where can he go? The business in Boston is to get drunk without anybody knowing it. Oh! George, George—my poor husband! My poor dear! My poor dear!'

What should she do?

The first thought of such a woman, so brought up, is for the daily bread of her children. Those who have never known the peril of such poverty as lessens the daily bread, do not begin by thinking of such a thing. The daughter of the small clerk thinks of it always. She has had actual experience either of her own or of friends in this direction. She has either felt, or witnessed others feeling, the actual pinch of unsatisfied hunger. Was the daily bread of her children in danger? Well, during these three years of her marriage there had always been enough, and more than enough. She had even saved a hundred pounds. Business at Boston had never, so far, interfered with the supplies.

Then she thought of other things, but in no proper sequence. A well-ordered mind would, I dare say, consider the degradation of the man first of all. Nettie did not. She considered the triumph of her mother and sister when the thing was found out—if it should be found out. And this thought filled her with rage and shame. She pictured her father grave, but not dissatisfied to find that his prejudice

against journalists was justified. Also the malicious joy of her brother Horatio, himself too much addicted to the cheerful glass and the convivial bar.

A better-educated mind would have considered with dismay the hereditary nature of the disease. Nettie had no such ideas. If a man committed the sin of drunkenness, he was a wicked man who ought to be punished, all the same as a man who robs his employer. She had no fears about her children, except that their father's weakness might interfere with their up-bringing, and that they might find it out. Therefore, it was not, after a little, pity for her husband that so much filled her soul as indignation and contempt. To go away and drink with a keeper! Not to be able to resist a simple temptation!—to those who know not, it seems a simple thing—but to yield at once, like a common drunken tramp! Oh! Shameful! So it was—most shameful; and yet—and yet—had she known the strength of the temptation! This, too, she was about to learn.

Business at Boston. That meant, she was perfectly certain, business at Mavis's house—she knew his address. Her husband gave it to her once with the injunction that if he should at any time be taken ill, she was to send for Mavis at once, in order to get business of an important kind arranged. Suppose she was to go there as well? She might get into the house: she might even bring her husband home safely: she might, at least, satisfy herself about these suspicions.

It was about half-past nine. She called her single servant.

'I am going out with the master,' she said. 'It may be quite late before I get back. Take both the children into your own room.'

Then she put on her hat and jacket, and sallied forth.

Within ten minutes' walk she came to the great highroad running north to Tottenham and Enfield and whatever lies beyond. In this highroad there are frequent tram-cars. She got into one of them, and was borne northwards.

Mr. Mavis occupied a cottage standing in its own grounds in the broad valley of the river Lea, near Tottenham. Though the town of Tottenham has been ruined and spoiled worse than any other suburban town in the world, by the erection of rows and terraces of hideous houses, there are places where some of the old houses—not the great old

houses, but the little cottages—may still be found. This house, built of the old red brick, and surrounded by a high red-brick wall, stood in the middle of a really spacious garden among trees: a cottage quite secluded and shut in. It was the last in the road, and beyond it stretched the low-lying meadows on either side of the Lea.

The cottage was, for the most part, unoccupied. No servant lived there and no caretaker: no gardener attended to cut the grass and attend to the flower-beds: the place was deserted, save that once in a while there were seen lights, and voices were heard. Yet it was tenanted: the rent and the rates and taxes were paid with regularity. It was said that a misanthropist lived here all by himself. He was a hermit: he was a miser: he was a criminal: no one knew who he was or what. Such tenants, so unknown, so mysterious, are not uncommon in London. For instance, there was a set of chambers in a certain Inn, some years ago, let to a man whose name was over the door. The name remained over the door for twenty years, during which the tenant never once came to the rooms, nor did anyone else call, nor were the rooms entered. At the end of that time, there was occasion to take up the floor for some gas-pipes. It was found that the rooms were absolutely bare and unfurnished. Why had the tenant taken those rooms?

Nettie found the place with little difficulty. She pushed open the gate and walked in, her courage rising rather than failing her as the time for action approached.

There was no light in the front of the house: she walked across the long, rank grass of the neglected lawn: the air was heavy with the fragrance of mignonette, honeysuckle, and all the flowers of midsummer.

She stood in the porch and listened. She heard the voices of men disputing. Here husband was there, then. She recognised his voice.

She stole round to the back of the house. There was a light on the ground-floor. But a white blind was pulled down, and she could see nothing. She listened, but the men talked in a low tone. She could distinguish nothing.

She went back to the porch. She would knock at the door and call her husband out. Feeling for the knocker, she became aware that the door yielded. It was not shut. She opened it cautiously and looked in. Everything was

dark; but the shadows defined themselves. She saw that the little hall was empty. For a light shone through the keyhole and under a door.

She stepped lightly across a hall, afraid of creaking boards.

Then she stooped—the thing has been often done before: it is almost classical: at such a moment, and under such circumstances, one is prepared to defend it: if it is necessary to find out what is going on in a room, it is often the only way. Nettie wanted very much to know: it was necessary that she should know: the thing was too terrible not to be faced: therefore, she stooped and—she looked through the keyhole.

Yes. Her husband was there, and the man Mavis.

The table was covered with bottles, tumblers, jugs of water, and bottles of soda, potash, and seltzer.

‘I tell you,’ said George, ‘that the time has come to make a stand. To-night, you say, it is the night when the Devil is due. I feel nothing. I am sober. I have no thirst upon me at all. I believe that if you had not come——’

‘I am paid to come.’

‘—I should not have been troubled at all. I believe you call the Devil up.’

‘He would come without any calling from me. Why now,’ said Mavis, ‘before a quarter of an hour—before’—he watched his master’s face keenly—‘before five—three minutes are out, you will have a tickling in the throat, then a dryness, next a hot and dry tickling, and then——’

‘Damn you!’ said George. ‘You have called the Devil, and he has come. Let me have air, and I will fight him!’

He pulled up the blind and threw the window wide open.

Nettie reflected that it would be safer and easier to look through the window than through the keyhole. Moreover, she would be able to see more. She therefore abandoned her position, and stole out of the house and so round to the back. Her husband was leaning out of the window, breathing the fresh air as if for coolness.

‘Oh!’ she thought. ‘I might throw my arms round his neck and drag him away.’

It is a pity, perhaps, that she did not. But too often we let pass the first thought, which is always the right thought, free from cowardice, pure from any unworthy motives. She did not throw her arms about him and drag him away.

She took up a position under an ash-tree, not too far from the window. The long branches fell before her like a veil. She held back the leaves, and could see and hear as well as if she was in the room.

Her husband left the window and began to pace the room restlessly. It was a mere den of a room. There was a small table of the commonest kind: one wooden arm-chair was at the head of the table, another at one side: the first was empty, on the second sat the man Mavis. The only other furniture in the room was a great sofa—long enough and broad enough, Nettie observed, even for her giant of a husband. The place was dirty, unswept, unwashed.

'This evening,' said George, 'I shall fight him for the first time. If I fight him once only, I shall defeat him for ever. Villain! Scoundrel!' He meant Mavis, not the Devil. 'If it had not been for you, I should have fought him on the voyage five years ago! But for you——'

'If it had not been for me, you would be lying dead at the bottom of the sea. Fight him, indeed! You fight him!'

'And you have made me draw a cheque for five thousand.' Something caught him in the throat. 'You are a forger and a thief! I shall go and see my agents, and warn them for the future.'

'No, you won't warn your agents,' said Mavis. 'Because, if you do, I shall leave you. And what will you do then? Five thousand! Well, if you like to make me presents while you are half drunk, it's your look-out. Little enough, too, considering what I've done for you. Dragged all round the world: made to live in this hole all alone: five good years thrown away, and a good place given up. And you kept all the time respectable, so that not a soul suspects; and you, with a quarter-of-a-million of your own, to grudge a paltry cheque like that! Why, it is starvation! You ought to be ashamed of yourself: you will be, too, in half-an-hour! And I shouldn't wonder if you didn't——'

He paused and grinned, and turned to his occupation, which was that of arranging the drink as if for a dozen men. First he pulled the corks from two bottles of whisky; then from half-a-dozen bottles of seltzer. Then he mixed the whisky and the seltzer in half-a-dozen great tumblers with an ostentatious and even enthusiastic gurgling. And

at the sound of the flowing drink, the glou-glou of the whisky, and the fizzing of the sparkling seltzer, George, who had assumed the attitude of the valiant soldier, such as Horatius who kept the bridge, trembled in his knees; and over his face—set to sternness, such as the face of him who leads a forlorn hope—there stole a weakening, visible and irresistible. There would be no fight after all, Nettie observed. And again she thought of rushing into the room to stop him even at the last moment.

Too late! With a groan George sank into the chair set for him. He was trembling and shaking in every limb: the room shook with his trembling: the drops stood upon his forehead, his cheek was pale with longing, his eyes were fierce with desire, his lips shook with yearning. He resisted no longer: he stretched forth his hand and seized one of the flowing glasses.

And Nettie understood the reason why he had business in Boston. She understood with a sinking heart. This man her husband? This man? Oh, the pity and the shame of it! She looked as if she could have wept and cried aloud, but wonder and amazement kept her still. He drained the glass. Mavis gave him another—and another. He tossed them down his throat as if he could not drink quickly enough. He seized the bottle and drank the raw spirit. Then he took another tumbler and drank that. He drank in great gulps: he drank without stopping: he was insatiable.

Good Heavens! And the man had been her companion for three years, always gentle, always kind, always temperate. Now she understood why he had fled from his own people.

The man Mavis sat at the table looking on. Nettie observed that he showed the utmost zeal in keeping up the spirit of the thing: opening bottles of seltzer, pouring out water, and making the tumblers fly, as if they were both engaged in the merriest, maddest, most frolicsome feast ever devised.

At last George set down the bottle empty. A whole bottle of whisky in a quarter-of-an-hour! And yet he lived. Now Nettie understood why he was so shy of other men. He was ashamed. In his sober time he remembered this time of orgie, and he was ashamed. He was not fit to

associate with men who command themselves. Yet, she remembered, he had thought himself fit to associate with her friends and herself.

He lay back in his chair, smiling benevolently. He was at rest. Surrender was followed by peace. It generally is. When the enemy has got all he wants, he is ready to make peace. George looked round him, peaceful and happy. Never before had his wife seen on his face that look of universal benevolence.

His eyes fell upon Mavis.

'You are my benefactor,' he said. 'Mavis, you are more than a servant: you are a fond and faithful friend!' He did not speak thickly, or in the least like a man under the influence of drink. 'You are more than a friend: you are my better self: my other half: my better half—the half which protects and provides'—he laid a fond hand upon the empty bottle—'provides and thinks beforehand. What can I do for you, dear friend? Is it money? Can money repay such devotion as yours? No! But if you want money—'

'Why,' said Mavis, 'money is always useful; and I'm past fifty; and here's your cheque-book and a bit of note-paper handy. Since you will have it, I'm not the man to say nay. We'll make it five thousand while we're about it. Five thousand—not a penny more.'

George nodded sweetly.

'Five thousand,' he said. 'Very good indeed; five thousand. It is too little. But since you insist on taking no more—'

He began to write. He wrote quite well and easily, in his usual handwriting. In ten minutes more he would be past the power of writing. This was the golden moment, known to every toper, when the brain seems—but is not—at its clearest and strongest. This moment past, the clouds gather: to think or to talk is impossible: nothing remains except to drink.

'I have written,' he said. 'I don't know what my lawyer has done with my money, whether it is lying at the bank, or whether they have invested it somewhere. I have drawn a cheque to their order, and I have written a letter. Here it is:

"On receipt of this note and its enclosure, please pay to the account of Joseph Mavis, at the Tottenham Branch of the Union Bank of London, the sum of £5,000.

"Yours very truly,

"GEORGE ATHELING."

'What name did he say?' Nettie asked. 'George what? Not George Humphrey. He believes that he is rich, and he has signed someone else's name. Oh! It is forgery!'

'There, my friend,' George continued. 'It is some comfort to me that, though I must fly from my friends and hide my head, I have got you to fall back upon.'

'Oh! you've got me fast enough.'

He took a black letter-case from his pocket, and carefully placed in it the letter and the cheque.

'When I came here,' George went on, 'I thought that among those little City clerks, and people of that sort, nobody would care what anybody did. I was wrong. They care more down here than they do up above. They think more of behaviour and conduct, not less—these worthy people. I would rather that Elinor Thanet found me out than my own wife, much rather—I should be less ashamed.'

'Oh, my love! Oh, George!' the wife murmured, 'and now she does know!'

'That's all right, then,' the man replied, without much sympathy. 'You must be getting dry by this time, I should say. Let's begin again. Let's have a night of it. Lord! I'm most as thirsty as you. Ha!'

He began, in his turn, to drink. Not with the mad greediness of his companion, but with a steady purpose, as if resolved to make up for lost time. As he drank, his pale cheeks became paler; but he lifted his eyes: they were such bad eyes, so full of evil, that Nettie understood now why she hated the sight of the man. Yet she had never before seen those eyes.

Then George, stimulated by the example before him, began again.

When Nettie presently, trembling and terrified, came forth from her hiding-place, both men were vulgarly and quite commonly drunk. No coal-heaver could be more drunk, short of the comatose state. They were laughing stupidly in each other's faces: they bawled snatches of

songs: but they were too drunk to remember more than bits of the air or of the words: they banged each other on the shoulders with their fists: they pawed each other: they addressed each other in terms of endearment.

The sight was terrifying and humiliating. Nettie could look on no longer. She went away. She walked through the dark garden into the dark lane, and made her way to the road where ran the trams. It was now, though she had seen so much, no more than eleven o'clock.

As the tram-car rolled along, she heard not the talk of the people round her, or the carts in the road, or anything. Her ears were full of the drunken singing of the man whom she had worshipped as the best and noblest of God's creatures!

CHAPTER XIV.

HE IS FOUND.

WHEN one has discovered a great secret: when one has a great burden laid on the unwilling shoulders: when there is a great grief: when there is a great terror to face—needs must that the trouble be imparted to some other person, even if it cannot be shifted or shared. Only to tell it brings relief.

The case was quite beyond her own people's power of advice. That, Nettie understood very well. Besides, they must not know. She was ashamed. They must never find out, if the thing could be concealed.

She could think of no one to advise her except her old friend, John Carew.

In the morning she went to his chambers, and fortunately found him at home.

Then she sat down and told her whole story from the very beginning. She had a patient listener, though it was a long story, and contained, before the point was reached, as many episodes, digressions, and explanations as an eighteenth-century novel. Like most women—the thing is illustrated by many lady novelists—she wanted the whole story to be told so that nothing could be left to the imagination. It therefore lost in dramatic force what it gained in completeness. The narrator went right back to the days when she

was in the Post Office, and to the beginning of her acquaintance with her George. You know the story.

'You will tell me what follows presently, Nettie,' said John Carew when she paused and burst into tears. 'Rest a little and recover yourself.'

'No, I must go on. You know that he has what he calls business at Boston every two months. A man comes to fetch him—it's always in the evening—and they go off together. He's a horrid man: he looks on the ground: he's got white and swollen cheeks: he dresses in black, like an undertaker.'

'I have heard of the mysterious business at Boston.'

'It isn't mysterious any longer. Now I know all about it. And this is what I've come to tell you about. And, oh, John! I'm the most miserable woman in the world!'

'Don't say that, Nettie! Tell me all, and we will see what can be done. There isn't—there isn't another woman in the case?'

'John! can you ask such a question? As if my George was capable—'

'No—no—of course not. But go on: tell me all.'

'Last night the man came again. Well, we'd been expecting his visit, and George, poor dear, was very low. However, he went upstairs, put his things together, and went off looking more miserable than ever I had seen him before. When he was gone I ran up to tidy the room after him, which he'd left in the most horrid mess. I found, tumbled down behind the door, an old overcoat, which I thought, as George never wears it, I would take away and put up in the next parcel to be sold. Well, in the pocket I found a letter—'

'A letter. And the letter contained a secret?'

'It was a letter—not addressed to George, but written to some lady—in his handwriting. It was in an envelope, gummed and stamped ready to be posted. And the envelope was brown with age, so that I knew it must be a letter written a long time ago and forgotten.'

'Well?'

'I was jealous, John. I won't deny that I was jealous. But I am not jealous any longer. Why shouldn't he be engaged before he met me? Why, I was engaged before he met me; twice I was engaged, and broken off each time.

That's nothing. I read the letter, and oh, John!—oh!—it told the whole dreadful truth about the business in Boston.'

'Oh! The dreadful truth—and not a woman in it, Nettie! He became very serious—'Not—not crime?'

'John! Crime? With my George—my husband?'

'Oh!' he sighed with relief. 'Not crime—not another woman? Do you know, I think it cannot be so very terrible.'

'You think so—well! But you shall just read the letter. It is addressed to a lady—a Miss Thanet—Elinor Thanet—'

'What?' John Carew bounded out of his chair. 'Elinor Thanet? Good Heavens! Elinor Thanet! What a blind idiot I have been—blind and deaf and stupid! Why, I ought to have guessed! Nettie, I know who your husband is. He is not George Humphrey at all! If Elinor had only once described him to me—if she had told me that he was big and blue-eyed, I should have guessed long ago. Good Heavens! Nettie, your husband is George Atheling, who has disappeared for five years!'

'He is my George—my husband!' cried his wife jealously.

'Of course, your husband. And I remember, besides, he must be the same Atheling who went down just before I went up. I found his photograph. Now I remember why his face was familiar to me. Stay! I've got it somewhere.' He began to search through some papers in a drawer. 'I know I have it still. It is here somewhere. Ah! here it is—before he grew that great beard. Is this your husband, Nettie?'

'Yes, this is George. He is younger, and he has no beard; but George, most certainly—George Humphrey, my husband.'

'George Atheling, I say!'

'Last night, when he was writing, he used that name; I did not understand, at the time, why. What does it mean, John? Oh! is this a new trouble?'

'I think not. Let me read the letter, however.'

He read the letter slowly, folded it up and laid it on the table.

Just then a telegram arrived.

'It is from Miss Thanet herself,' said John. 'She has heard from George. Why, I consulted him about finding himself! He must have gone straight and written to her.'

She says : " I have heard from him : he is living and well. Come to advise me." I actually consulted George Humphrey about finding George Atheling ! And he advised me to stop the search after him. Therefore, he knew that we were looking after him. He advised me not to advertise ; but the advice came too late. Nettie, this is a terrible thing for you to learn. You will want all your courage. You believe that this business at Boston is nothing more than what he indicates in this letter ?

' I have not told you all.'

She told the whole story as you have heard it, sparing no detail.

' And now, John, what am I to do ?' she concluded. ' Never mind about Miss Thanet. Think of me and my poor children first.'

' Yes, Nettie ; Elinor Thanet must come after you. There is no doubt, first, that your husband is subject to these attacks of drink-craving, as you say that he is always perfectly and completely sober at other times. Probably the sight of this man has something to do with the violence of the attacks—the sight of the man and the presence of the drink. The man, I should think, encourages his master for his own purposes. You say that he gave him five thousand pounds last night ? Why, two months ago he gave him the same sum !'

' My husband hasn't got a hundred pounds in the world.'

' Nettie, there is another discovery for you. Your husband is not a poor journalist at all. He is a rich man—a very rich man. I do not know how rich. He has several thousands a year.'

' Oh ! No—it can't be !'

' It certainly is so. He hasn't made away with his fortune. The cheque of five thousand pounds is the only cheque that he has drawn for three years.'

' Rich ! Then my boys—oh ! John—my boys——'

' Will be rich as well. Nettie, you have found out a terrible secret. But you have also found a secret which may bring consolation, and even help.'

' What am I to do, John ? Oh ! what am I to do ? For if he finds out that I know all, he will be shamed : he will run away and desert me. And if he goes away again on

business to Boston, I shall die of anxiety and pity for him. Oh! he thinks I should despise him! I, who have never found him anything but full of love! Oh! John, I am full of pity for him. I was full of rage when I went after him—but it was so dreadful to think of him as I saw him last night—so fallen—so degraded—my George!

'Let me try to do something for you. Leave him to me—I have at least an idea. He can't run away this morning, I am quite sure. Leave him to me.'

'But, John, don't tell him that I know.'

'I never will. Go now, Nettie. Go with some relief to your poor heart. You know the worst. Now go, and let me think.'

The cottage at Tottenham on this splendid summer morning, surrounded by flowers and trees, covered with creepers, looked like a bridal bower—a sweet, sacred spot reserved for honeymoons, the rest of a newly-married pair. It was perfectly quiet: except for a thrush or a blackbird, there was hardly any sound in the air: you could hear the hum of the countless insects about the flower-beds: and though the lawn was neglected and the grass long and the flowers were mixed with weeds, the place looked beautiful and inviting. Round the house was a brick wall of great ancientness, the top covered with long grasses and wall-flowers. A policeman stood outside the gate, gazing upon this scrap or remnant of Eden.

About eleven o'clock a carriage came down the lane, and stopped before the gate. A gentleman got out, followed by two commissionaires, stalwart, well set-up men. The policeman watched him curiously.

'I want,' said the gentleman, who was John Carew, 'to find a house tenanted by one Mr. Mavis.'

The policeman smiled mysteriously and pointed within.

'This is Mr. Mavis's house?'

The policeman smiled again and pointed within.

'Well. Do you know if he's within—at this moment?'

'Oh! Yes—he's within. You'll find him. The other gentleman is there too.'

'The other gentleman who comes here to stay a day or two. I have come, in fact, for him.'

'Well, you'll find them there—but——'

'You mean that it will be difficult to get speech of them. Is that it? I know all about it, you see.'

'Last night,' said the policeman, 'I heard them. They're a cheerful pair when they do get together! I suspected something, so I went in. The door was open, and a window was wide open. I shut the door, but the window I left open. As for making them understand anything—there! You can let yourself in by getting through the window if you like. You don't look like one who would steal anything, and there's nothing to steal except a bottle of whisky or so.'

John Carew followed his guidance, and entered by that method.

Lying on a sofa breathing stertorously, his cheeks swollen and red, lay George Humphrey. He was evidently in a deep sleep, from which he would not awaken for some hours. On the floor lay the other man, Mavis, also sound asleep, and in a similar condition.

John opened the front door to admit his commissionaires. Then he looked round the house. Every room, except one bedroom, was empty and unfurnished. If this man lived in the house, it must have been a most uncomfortable way of living. Then he returned to the first room. On the table he saw a black letter-case. He remembered the story of the letter and the cheque.

'At all events,' he said, 'if George wants to give him this money, which I doubt, he shall give it when he is sober.' He opened the case and took out the papers. 'When you wake up, my honest fellow'—he addressed the sleeping servant—'you will remember the cheque, and you will search for it, and you will not find it. Then will your heart sink like lead, and your amazement shall make your knees to totter; and what with hot coppers and the disappointment, and the anxiety about the cheque and the disappearance of your master, your condition will be very bewildering and uncomfortable!'

'Poor beast!' he turned to the contemplation of George. 'This is how we meet! This is the man whose face so filled me with admiration six years ago! I remember him now. This is the reason why he took his name off the books. Poor wretch! What an affliction! He is the slave of the ex-gyp—the slave of this creature!'

He turned the prostrate body over with his foot. Then, by the aid of the two stout commissionaires, he carried the sleeping man—George Atheling—out of the cottage, placed him in the carriage, and drove away.

CHAPTER XV

THE MOUTH OF HELL.

GEORGE returned to consciousness in the afternoon, about three o'clock. From long experience, he knew perfectly well what had happened. It was, he remembered, the day after the first orgie. He was in the cottage, lying on the sofa: he knew this without opening his eyes. He had got through the first of the two attacks: the second would seize him presently, but not for a few hours; not till he had partly recovered from the first. The second attack was always fiercer, but more easily and quickly subdued by him who made haste to surrender. He knew that if he moved his head it would be as heavy as lead: he knew also that if he tried to get up he should stagger and fall. Therefore, he lay quite still, his eyes closed. He grew more wakeful: he heard voices—the voices of men talking somewhere—one voice that he knew very well. The sound of voices, even where there are no voices, does not greatly alarm a man in this condition and with these experiences. Sometimes George would see shapes—figures, whole regiments and armies of creatures, with faces of the most frightful ugliness. Voices are not half so bad as faces. Voices can shout and swear and threaten, but they do not terrify like faces. Besides, these voices were only murmurs—low and peaceful murmurs: no harm in these voices at all. Better to listen to these voices than to the hated voice of Mavis.

He became more wakeful still. Another illusion: it seemed now as if his head were reposed on a soft pillow and his limbs on a spring mattress: as if his hands were lapped in soft sheets, and that blankets were laid upon him: in a word, it seemed as if he was in bed. Everybody knows exactly how it feels to be in bed. Strange mockery of his senses! Why, he was on the hard horsehair sofa at the cottage, and most likely Mavis was lying drunk on the

floor; and it was probably the middle of the night. Then a door opened, and the voices became audible. And then he heard a footstep in the room itself, and he opened his eyes.

He was not at the cottage at all. He was in a bedroom, a large bedroom, properly furnished: not his own bedroom in Daffodil Road, which was of small dimensions, but a full-sized bedroom.

What could this mean? Christopher Sly himself was not more surprised, nor that other honest toper whose head was cut off by the benevolent Peter, also styled the Great, so that he might awake from his drunken sleep to find himself in Paradise. No death was ever devised more happy. George half turned his head. The owner of the footstep he observed was none other than John Carew, and he wondered whether this also was an illusion.

'So,' he said, at the bedside, 'you are awake at last, are you?'

'Where am I?'

'In my rooms.'

'Oh!' He closed his eyes again, in order to fix his mind on this new phenomenon; then he opened them once more.

'How came I here?'

'I brought you.'

'Oh!'

Once more he closed his eyes. This was all a dream—he was in dream and ghostland. A more complicated dream than is commonly encountered, but still only a dream. There could be no John Carew, no bed, no chamber at all—only the sofa and the cottage.

'I brought you here, man; I brought you in a carriage. I found out where you were lying, and I went there on purpose to bring you back. Don't think you are dreaming. This part of your thoughts, at least, is not *delirium tremens*. I found you lying on a sofa in your cottage, as drunk as a log and as senseless. I had you carried to the carriage and brought you away.'

'How did you find me?'

'That is my secret. Well, this is what you call going to Boston on business! Noble business!'

George shut his eyes again.

'Every man,' he said feebly, 'is master of his own actions, I suppose.'

'If you were master of yours, you would not be lying here in this condition. Come, you know it!'

George made no reply.

'You your own master?' repeated John Carew. 'Why, you are a slave—a miserable slave! You are a coward—you run away from a bogey——'

'I wish you had such a bogey after you!'

'I know exactly what happens to you. Every two months you are assailed by a craving for drink. It is a very well-known disease, in one form or the other. Thousands of men have it. The only way to meet it is to fight it. You don't fight it: you give in at once. You go away with this wretched creature of yours, who encourages you for purposes of his own, and you drink like a hog with him till the fit passes away.'

'All this,' said George, 'is quite true. I assure you, however, that it is not the smallest use to say it, unless for the relief of your conscience.'

'Very well. Some day—perhaps when your boys have arrived at a time of life which will enable them to feel the degradation—you will be exposed: you will be caught and detected. You are certain to be found out. Your servant will grow tired of you. He is already devising a plan for making himself independent of you. He has stolen five thousand pounds of you. That you know already, because you heard it from me. Last night he made another attempt. He made you write an order on your agents for another five thousand pounds.'

'No! no!' cried George. 'He had not the impudence——'

'He had, indeed. I am only surprised, considering all things, that he did not make it fifty thousand while he was about it. But such a man cannot soar very high in robbery. To him ten thousand pounds seems a vast sum of money. My opinion is that in robbing you of these sums his intention is to leave you and go away. He must have made a good deal out of you in the five years. Have you any idea what he has cost you?'

'Is this a time for arithmetic? Well, when I started journalist I took a thousand pounds with me—something to fall back upon. I haven't spent any of it on myself.'

'It's all gone, I suppose?'

'I believe it is all gone in three years.'

'Then, of course, he thinks that when he can get no more money out of you, it will be time to leave you. Well then, when he is gone, what will you do next?'

'I don't know: make away with myself.'

'Oh! No, you won't do that. You will look out for another attendant. Then the thing will get whispered about, and so will become known. Why, I know it already: other people know it. I have learned this secret of yours; and, with it, the whole reason of your life—your flight and your disappearance—'

'What do you know about my life?'

'I will tell you presently. For the moment, remember that there is no Mavis here. I do not think you will ever see the respectable Mavis any more. At least, I hope you will not.'

George sat up in bed, resolution in his face.

'Will you go away? I am going to get up and dress.'

'What shall you do when you are dressed?'

'I shall go back to the cottage.'

'Very well, then. You can't dress, you see, because I've had all your clothes taken away. And you can't wear mine, because you are six-feet-three and I am five-feet-nine. Eh?'

To this George made no reply. He fell back on the pillows. Besides, his head was heavy: he could not get up and dress, even if he had the wherewithal.

'Is your fit gone for good? I mean, for the present?'

'No.'

'Will there be another attack?'

'Yes.'

He glared at his captor, looking about him as if for some clothes—any clothes—in which he could get back to the cottage.

'When do you expect it?'

'Not till this evening. It may come any moment; but, as a rule, I do not expect it till the evening, when I have partly recovered from the first attack.'

'Oh! I am glad—I am very glad—that you are going to have another attack, because I have made every preparation for it. You shall see how hospitable I shall be.'

'If your preparations do not include whisky,' said George calmly, 'there will be trouble. I warn you—I shall have the strength of three men!'

'So I have been told ; I have therefore laid in a stock of strong men. There will be quite as many of them here as we are at all likely to want. You may be perfectly easy on that point. Whatever trouble may result from the absence of whisky, be assured that you yourself——'

'Oh, you don't know—you don't know!'

'My dear fellow, it is true that I don't know. Thank God I do not know, but I can guess. No drink at all except water, and for companion of your bedside—your own wife!'

'My wife? My wife? No, Carew, not that! You have not been so inhuman?'

'Why not? Since it depends wholly on yourself whether you will conquer this weakness or not—since she is not supposed to know what is the matter——'

'Oh! You have not told her?'

'No'—this was perfectly true—'I have not told her. That, my friend, I leave to you. Nobody shall tell her but you. She will sit at your bedside. When the attack begins you will tell her what it is, if you cannot fight it. Then the strong men will come in and your wife will go out. And in the morning we shall know what to do next.'

George lay back groaning.

'This is sheer cruelty! It is torture! You do not know!'

'Since torture is the only thing that will cure, let us apply torture by all means. Suppose that torture had been applied by yourself five years ago. It would have been like the pricking of a pin compared with the pain you will feel this night. Yet you must bear it. Think of it as the flames of purgatory.'

He shook his head and groaned again.

'Come, you shall have a cup of tea. Will you eat anything?'

'Give me the tea.'

When he had taken the tea his eyes closed. He dropped off to sleep again. He slept for two hours. It was half-past five when he woke.

John Carew was at his bedside still.

'Come,' he said, 'you have had a refreshing sleep. I have got some beef-tea and toast for you. Will you take that?'

'So'—after awhile—'do you feel strong enough to go

on with our talk? I have got a great deal to say, and perhaps the fit will seize you again.'

'No, I think not—I feel no symptoms of it.'

'Partly because the scoundrel Mavis is not with you to suggest the craving and to pour out the drink. Now, then. First of all, I know who you are. I have found that out. You are George Atheling. You took your name off the books of your College at the end of your second year and went down without taking your degree. You were engaged to Elinor Thanet, and you broke off the engagement: you separated yourself from your old friends and lived alone: you went on a voyage: you came home: you then dived down into lower depths of society: you became a journalist: you have deserted your fortune as well as your friends: you live on your earnings: and you are married. All this because you have never once had the courage to fight this bogey.'

'I do not ask how you found out all this,' George replied.

'Of course it is all true. Yet do not tell my wife!'

'I think she may know something of this already. You may find out, if you please, what she does know.'

'How long have you known all this?'

'Only a few hours.'

George sat up in bed. 'Man, if I do not satisfy this Devil, he will rend me limb from limb!'

'Bogey! He threatens—he can do nothing. Stand up to him—fight him. Now listen, Mr. George Atheling, because I am going to speak very plainly with you. The time has come when action must be taken.'

'Go on—I am listening. But it will all come to nothing. This Devil is more crafty than you think.'

'Is he? That shall be seen. Your wife will presently come to nurse you. I shall have a supply ready of lemons, apollinaris-water, coffee, tea—anything you may want. We shall keep watch—the strong men and I—by turns in the next room. If you face the Devil like a man and fight him till he flies, we shall do nothing—you will be alone with your wife. If, on the other hand, you surrender and begin to rave and to rage and to cry for the drink which you will not get: if you jump out of bed and attempt to search for drink, either in this room or the next, you will be seized by the strong men and bound and tied with ropes such as even

Samson could not snap. I assure you that my men are very strong, and that they understand this kind of work. So far you follow?'

'Yes—I follow. You will drive me mad!'

'I am coming to that. Curious that you should anticipate my thoughts. When you are tied down and helpless—possibly, as you say, by that time raving mad—I shall send for a doctor. It will then be time to interfere for the sake of your own wife and children. I shall have you treated as a madman in reality: you shall be removed to an asylum.'

'You cannot,' said George. 'No doctor would sign the certificate. You can prove that I was drunk, not that I was mad. It is very good bounce, however.'

'Do not deceive yourself. Come, you are a man of sense. Let us consider the facts of the case.'

'No facts will make me out to be mad.'

'Let us see. You are a man of wealth and position: you abandon both—why? You have given up all your friends, and have gone to live alone, among people of a lower class—why? This you have done, not from philanthropy or religion or poverty or disgrace, or any of the ordinary motives that make men do such things. Not at all. Nor have you done it in order to give a free rein to vicious inclinations. Not in the least. Why, then?'

'Reason enough,' said George grimly.

'Not at all. Because, if there was a thing to be concealed from your old friends, there is the same thing to be concealed from your new friends. Act of a madman. You have gained nothing by the change. There was no motive at all for it. Next you become a journalist. Being a man of learning and culture, you choose to live on the precarious earnings of a local journalist reporter—penny-a-liner—while you have waiting for you an income of seven thousand pounds a year. Nay, you go farther. You marry a girl of this class—not a disgraceful class, quite the reverse; but not a class in which gentlewomen are reared. You have children whose rights are your own: they are the heirs to this great property. Yet you prefer to bring them up as the children of a man who is happy if he gets three hundred a year.'

'Yet that does not make me mad.'

'We pass over the Australian fiction and the false name,

because they belong to the situation. Next, you can be proved to be in the power of a man, formerly a gyp at Cambridge and afterwards your servant. He comes at certain periods and drags you away with him to a cottage near Tottenham, where, together, you conduct disgraceful orgies not to be accounted for except under the supposition of madness. And you reward this man with immense sums of money. A week ago you sent him five thousand pounds, and last night another five thousand, though it is not certain whether he will secure that plunder. If it is necessary, in order to show how mad you are, he shall have it. For what consideration did you give that man ten thousand pounds in one week? For acting as a keeper or attendant? But you pay him for that; you give him his wages. And he has got in three years a thousand pounds out of you for alleged expenses. You knew that he cheated you, of course?

George groaned.

'I knew he was a thief; but I could do nothing!'

'Putting everything together, my dear boy,' said John Carew cheerfully, 'I have not the least doubt that we shall prove you to be as mad as Nebuchadnezzar.'

'Your wife,' he went on, 'has arrived here. She is in the other room. I have told her you are very ill. She will come and sit by you. She will talk to you. Presently you will, perhaps, fall asleep: when you wake up, you will, perhaps, get the next attack. Say to yourself, that whatever you do—whether you rage and roar, whether you cry and beseech, or whether you fight—it all comes to the same thing—you will get no drink. You are thinking of flight. You cannot very well get to Tottenham from South Kensington in a white night-dress, with no money and my strong men all running after you. You must be frightfully mad to think of such a thing. Don't glare at me, man! You are now brought face to face with your Devil. For the first time, you are obliged to fight or to go mad. Because I verily believe, George Atheling, that if you give way to him this time: if you let him clutch your throat this once, now that there is no drink to satisfy him, you will truly go stark, staring, raving mad! We will have this business settled once for all.'

The big man tossed his arms in a kind of despair. 'The net was about him: there was no way out of it.' He thought of the voyage, and of that knob so carefully pre-

pared for him by the best of servants. Had Mavis been within reach, he would have offered that last cheque of five thousand pounds for drink. For he saw before him such a time as Damien expected when he was taken forth to have his flesh wrenched off with red-hot pincers and to be torn to pieces by wild horses.

'Atheling,' John Carew added earnestly, 'this may be the most fateful moment in your life. All depends now upon your courage. Your wife will be with you to keep up your resolution.'

George turned his face to the wall to hide the emotion that filled his eyes.

'Your wife, who has believed you the strongest and best man in the whole world! Think what is at stake! Her life's happiness: your own self-respect: the whole future of your children: all depend upon your courage this night.'

'You do not know—you do not know,' George repeated. 'The Thing is a Devil: he will take my life: he will tear me to pieces!'

'Not he. You are as strong as a bull! Put forth your strength. You are worth fifty such Devils. And, besides, you won't have beside you the other Devil—the man who chinks the glasses and pours out the drink, and eggs you on—'

'How do you know that he does?'

'I know everything. Now, promise you will fight him.'

'I promise. Only, I have promised before; and the Devil always wins.'

'Then, by the Lord Harry, George Atheling, if the Devil wins this time, you shall be the prize show of the mad-house! My men are waiting for you. And my doctor will be ready with another doctor to sign the certificate. Heaven or Hell—whichever you choose—with Purgatory between. Odd that you can get into Hell as well as out of it, through Purgatory. The church-people have forgotten that!'

John Carew went away. A minute later he returned, bringing Nettie and the boy—the little George—the two-year-old.

'He has had a bad night, Nettie,' said John, 'and he fears another bad night. I think that nothing can be done for him but to watch him and give him cooling things.'

Nettie bent over her husband and kissed him, weeping.

'Here is your boy: sit up and play with him a little—it won't hurt you. Nay,' said John, 'it should do you good. Here is a fine little laddie for you! Worth making a bit of a fight, for the sake of such a lusty little chap as this—isn't it?' The boy ran laughing over the bed into his father's arms. 'What a belief a child has in his father!' said John, uttering the commonplace as if it was a perfectly original remark never before heard of—a discovery newly made. Yet, it had its effect. 'Now this boy,' he went on, 'believes that his father can do no wrong: that his father is strong enough to conquer the whole world: that his father is able to get anything or be anything that he wishes. Fancy the disgust of such a boy as this, if he were to find that his father was a coward, a sneaking poltroon, afraid to face a bogey!'

'John,' said Nettie, 'please not to say such things!'

'I beg your pardon, Nettie. I was speaking generally. Well, the next thing is, what we should give this man by way of food? It is now getting on for seven. I think he will sleep if we give him food. Will you rest in the other room, Nettie? I will watch him till nightfall.'

'No, John; my place is here.'

She sat down and took George's hands.

John Carew went out, taking the child with him.

Husband and wife were left alone.

Nettie threw her arms round George's neck.

'My dear—my dear,' she said, 'I must not hide anything from you. Last night I found a letter in your pocket addressed to a girl, and I was jealous and opened it. The letter was five years old, and it told me—oh! George, it told your secret. Then I thought I would follow and drag you away from that man. And I took the tram and got to the cottage, and stood outside the open window, and saw—oh! George, God help us both! I saw all—I saw all! Oh! my husband—oh! my dear—my poor dear—I saw all!'

'If you saw what was done—if you saw and heard—Nettie, I have dreaded this discovery ever since I met you. I need make no confession—now you know all that there is to tell. You have found out all that there was to hide.' He sighed heavily. Perhaps it was a relief that the thing was known. 'Nettie,' he said, 'since you know so much,

you had better know the whole. My name is not Humphrey at all.'

'I know that too. John Carew told me. And you are rich. And now I know why you talked so much about riches and poverty. But talk no more, dear. Try and rest.'

'As for forgiveness——' said George.

'Oh! forgiveness—me to forgive? Why, dear, if you had done these things at home even, there would be no question of forgiveness. It is not the man I saw last night that I love; but my George—my good and tender husband—the father of my babes. Oh! my dear, do not speak of forgiveness; you tear my heart!'

* * * * *

At midnight, George, who had fallen into a gentle sleep, awoke with a violent start. He sat up in bed, catching his breath with a gasp. He threw off the bedclothes. He would have leaped out of bed, but that Nettie laid her hand on him.

'My dear,' she said, 'patience. I am here. Courage and patience. It is for the children's sake.'

She turned up the light. He looked round and remembered. He was not on the sofa of the cottage.

'Remember,' she said, 'you have sworn. We have prayed together. Oh! George, for the love of God, for the sake of the children!'

'Take my hand. Take my hand. Speak to me. Let me not lose myself. The Devil is here—his fingers are at my throat—his burning fingers. Ah!'

There followed a conflict more determined, more terrible, than the historic duello of Christian and Apollyon. It was as if Christian had been so often beaten, and so cowed by continual defeat, that his heart was taken out of him. Man against Devil—man with no other weapon than the shield of endurance—Devil armed with all the weapons, sword to strike, lance to pierce, red-hot pincers to burn and tear.

Beside the bed stood or knelt the wife, holding fast her husband's hand; cooling his burning forehead with a wet sponge; soothing, consoling, encouraging him; praying aloud for him, that the Lord would strengthen him in this hour of agony; torn with the anguish of witnessing the tortures of one fighting against the most dreadful of all ills

which beset body and soul—the maddened craving for drink. It was such torture as caused this great man to roll about and writhe: it made his eyes start and stare wildly: it made him gasp and fight for breath: but he would not give in. It seemed the last chance for him—it was really only one of the last chances. He would not cry for drink.

From time to time his mind wandered, and he talked incoherently.

“Then,” he said, quoting from some old voyager, “they sailed their craft for two days along the coast; and the heat of the place was such that they called it Pernambuco, or the Mouth of Hell—so that some of the men went mad and jumped overboard, crying for the cool water, and so perished miserably. But those who held on presently came to a pleasant haven, where there were fruits and springs of water and cool breezes; and so were refreshed and comforted.”

And so on—talk strange—talk of a man in the intervals of torture. When they racked the victims of the Holy Inquisition, between the rackings the wretches would murmur of sweet streams and soft banks and love, and all kinds of pleasant things. Then the screw was turned, and they came back to agony.

For two hours, while the agony brought out the beads upon his forehead, and swelled the veins of his neck and face, and cramped his limbs. For two hours. Every moment of yielding, during the last five years, lengthened the torture: every moment of surrender made that torture worse.

‘Oh! my dear!—my dear!—my brave, dear George!—my poor, dear George!’ murmured his wife.

In the room outside, John Carew paced up and down, listening. He heard the prayers of the wife: he heard her words of comfort and of encouragement. He looked to hear the cry of surrender and despair, when he must take away the wife and send in the strong men—his garrison, who were asleep on the kitchen chairs, ready for action. But that cry came not. And he marvelled; for still the wife prayed, and still she encouraged her husband, and still there was silence, save for such murmured words as you have heard when his mind wandered.

In all great suffering, in all times of great trouble, there comes a supreme moment when it seems as if no more

could be borne, but that madness must follow. At this moment death comes, or the suffering ceases, and the patient lives.

To George there came such a moment. He fell back: his face was ghastly: he gasped: his hands were clenched: his eyes stared: his limbs were contorted: he seemed to be dying. His wife bent over him, breathless.

Then a change. The ghastliness left his cheeks. He closed his eyes: he sighed: he composed his limbs. Was he dying? No. He breathed softly: he lay at rest. The battle was over. He had beaten the Devil!

Presently he opened his eyes.

'It is over, Nettie. It is all over. The Devil has gone. He will not come again for two months. When next he comes, we will fight him again. Kiss me, dear. Have no longer any fear. Lie down now and rest. Or, one service more. Pull back the curtains: let me see the day again.' The sky was now splendid with the rising sun. 'Oh! my dear—my dear—the new day begins—the new day. Lie down and sleep, and let me think of the new day—and of the children—and of you. Lie down and sleep, and take your rest. Nettie—Nettie—do not cry. It is over. I am a free man at last! I am a free man! That is'—and here his voice dropped to a whisper, which his wife, thanking God upon her knees, heard not—'that is, I think I may be a free man. But I doubt—I doubt. It is a cunning Devil!'

CHAPTER XVI.

THE REWARD.

THE political views of the Patager family are divided. Thus, the elder Patager takes in the *Echo*, his son Horatio the *Star* (but, perhaps, more for its sporting tips than for its politics), and Victoria's husband takes the *Evening News*. They generally read the whole paper through slowly: it is the chief, sometimes the only, literature of these people: it is their sole method of communication with the outer world. Many of the lower creatures communicate by means of tentacles, filaments, and so forth, with the things around

them. It is man's privilege to communicate with the world around him by means of the newspapers. They administer to him, when he can learn it, a daily lesson in humanity. They also provide for him his principal means of taking pleasure. How else, or where, can one get a whole evening's amusement for the ridiculous sum of one halfpenny?

Mr. Patager, senior, industriously and regularly reads all the advertisements right through. He keeps this part of the paper, indeed, for the last: it is his *bonne bouche*: it gives him more satisfaction even than the correspondence columns. The announcement of houses to be let or sold, of lodgings offered to young men, of situations vacant or wanted, of profitable exchanges, of things to be sold, of great bargains—all alike, if not equally, interest him—I know not why, except as a love story may, for the memories it awakens, interest an ancient dame. Mostly, of course, he delights in the personal advertisements. He reads with pleasure the reminder to H. B. that his wife awaits him with forgiveness: the hint from Queenie that she expects Tom at the next appointment, or she must seek advice: the thieves' tip conveyed in a piece of information concerning A. B., of Bradford: the recall of the prodigal son, with the promise of a fatted calf: all these things may be turned by an imaginative mind into romance, comedy, and tragedy. We know that if H. B. does return to his wife, he will probably meet with reproaches harder to bear than the oaken cudgel: we are quite sure that Queenie has already deposited all Tom's letters with a solicitor, and that she awaits with cheerfulness either the wedding-ring or substantial damages; and if we have any experience at all of prodigal sons, this one most certainly will not come back so long as a single shilling remains, because, you see, the domestic fatted calf is insipid compared with the same dish served up hot and hot, with the ladies and gentlemen in the flowery path.

This evening, Mr. Patager, senior, read in its turn an advertisement which at first he nearly passed by. Then something in it caught his eye, and he read it again, with attention.

'My dear,' he said, looking up slowly, 'there is something very strange about this.'

'About what?'

'About this advertisement. Listen:

"FIFTY POUNDS REWARD.—The above reward will be paid to anyone who will give information as to the present residence of GEORGE ATHELING, gentleman, of Atheling Court, Bucks, if he is living; or as to the time and place of his death, if he is dead. He was last heard of in January, 1887. The said George Atheling is about twenty-eight years of age: he is six feet three inches in height: he has blue eyes and dark-brown hair: he is broad-shouldered and strong: his voice is low and musical. He has, perhaps, assumed some other name. Address Messrs. Mansfield and Westbury, solicitors, 109, New Square, Lincoln's Inn."

'Why—good gracious, my dear!' The wife jumped out of her chair. 'Let me read it! "Six feet three," "blue eyes," "dark-brown hair," "broad-shouldered," "twenty-eight," "his voice——" Why—why—who—who—she gasped—who should it be but our Nettie's George?'

'Our Nettie's George! No other!' Mr. Patager echoed solemnly. 'They have advertised for him. Now, what does that mean? "Gentleman, of Atheling Court"—of Atheling Court—it can't be; yet the description, my dear, tallies in every particular.'

'Let me read it again,' said the wife. 'My dear, all I've prophesied has come true.' She returned the paper and sat down with a smile of triumph. 'Often and often have I said, "That man's done something. Some day he'll be found out," and now you see.'

'It certainly does look like it. But the name is different, and "gentleman," you see, not journalist.'

'We're all gentlemen, I suppose,' said his wife.

'In the City, yes. But we draw the line at journalists.'

'Fifty Pounds Reward!' said the wife, looking at her husband with meaning.

'I wonder what he's done?' said the husband. 'Embezzlement, perhaps—forgery, perhaps——'

'Fifty Pounds Reward!' the wife repeated. 'Fifty Pounds Reward! My dear, why shouldn't we have that money?'

'What! And give up my own son-in-law to justice? Shame! Shame!'

'If you come to that, somebody else will very soon give him up. Better you than a stranger. Why, you might

make terms for him, and still put the money in your pocket. Go yourself and see these lawyers.'

Mr. Patager stared at his wife. To betray his daughter's husband was one thing. To ask what the lawyers meant, and, if there was no betraying, to put fifty pounds in his pocket, was quite another thing.

'My poor Nettie!' sighed the mother. 'What in the world will she do now? Her husband found out, clapped in prison, brought before the judge, found guilty, condemned to penal servitude. Well! it's one comfort that the headstrong girl got no consent from us. She went into it of her own stubborn will. You remember she would have the man.'

'She would have him. That's one comfort. But it's a dreadful disgrace, think of that! My dear,' he got up slowly, 'the least we can do is to warn him: I will step round. He may be able to get off in time——'

'I'll come too,' said his wife. 'In her time of trouble, Nettie shan't say we've deserted her. Besides, we may find out what he's done.'

They walked down the road together. The house was in darkness, and shut up. No one answered the bell: it was deserted.

What had happened?

The pair looked at each other.

'I know,' said the wife. 'He's been warned. He's taken Nettie and the babies and the gal, and he's run for it. He will get over to America, where they'll never catch him, and we shall never see Nettie any more.'

'I hope it may be so. I hope he'll get away. I do hope he'll get away!'

'And to-morrow you'll go and see those lawyers and find out what he's wanted for, and you may claim that reward. Fifty pounds! it'll come in handy; and since Nettie's gone out of the way, and the babies and all, and no more harm can come to her, and somebody else'll get that money, you go first thing to-morrow morning to the lawyers.'

'Well, my dear, it does seem like betraying of your own flesh and blood, doesn't it? I don't altogether like it.'

'Nonsense! How are you ever going to get on if you won't even pick up what lies at your feet? Now, my dear,' she turned upon her husband with a kind of fierceness, 'what

did I always say? What did I tell you? A man forced to go into hiding! Now, I hope I shall be believed another time!

They went home together, but apart: the woman full of a fierce joy—the son-in-law whom she hated had come to grief; the man full of shame and pity.

In a certain billiard-room Horatio Patager sat watching the game of pool. He never played pool at all, nor billiards unless he could find a player worse than himself, because his stroke was uncertain and his play flukey. He sat and looked on, he smoked cigarettes all the time, he laid a shilling now and then, and when he could afford it he drank a whisky-and-soda.

This evening he held in his hand a copy of the *Star*, at which he glanced from time to time, but lazily, because this evening the journal was mostly political. Suddenly he started: he changed colour: he dropped his cigarette. You have heard already what he read.

'Why,' he murmured, 'it's his very description. It's his likeness to the life. Every point of it is his likeness. Six feet three high, blue eyes, dark-brown hair, broad-shouldered, low voice—there can't be two like him. "Gentleman" they call him! We're all gentlemen, if you come to that. "Of Atheling Court." Name of the place where he comes from. Changed his name. Fifty Pounds Reward! I wonder what he's done? I wonder what he'll get? Well, I'm sorry for Nettie. But it serves her right. Fifty Pounds Reward! Ha! I always knew he'd done something. Changed his name. Fifty Pounds Reward!'

He left the billiard-room and strolled in the direction of his sister's house. He would look in, perhaps, casually, just to see the man for whose capture they were going to give Fifty Pounds Reward. This was the man who ordered Nettie not to lend him anything. Ha! The time had come. Vengeance!

He could not gaze upon the man at so interesting a crisis of his fortunes, because the house was dark and shut up.

'He must have bolted,' said Horatio, 'and has taken Nettie and the kids with him. Never mind, they can easily be followed, and—and—and—I'll get that reward, or I'll know the reason why.'

Victoria's husband, we have seen, read the *Evening News*. He read it after supper, when there was nothing left of the day except an hour of tobacco and rest.

He, too, chanced presently upon the advertisement.

'Vic,' he said, changing colour, 'what was George Humphrey before he came here?'

'I don't know. Nobody knows, not even Nettie. She pretends to know, but she doesn't really know. He won't tell.'

'He wasn't always a penny-a-liner, Vic.'

'Very likely not.'

'It's my opinion that he was formerly a gentleman. I mean—of course, we are all gentlemen, but I mean a swell with money. There's swell written all over him; and as for money, he buys things without asking their price. Nobody but a born swell ever does that. And he spends sixpence as if he was made of sixpences.'

'What are you driving at, Charlie? There's something on your mind.'

'Well, I told you what the chap from Melbourne said. "No such name in the place," he said. Now let me go on. George was once a swell—I'm sure of it. George is down in his luck—why? George has got through his money: George has done something—'

'Ah!' cried Vic, waking up, and now thoroughly interested.

'They always do something when there is no more money. It's the regular rule. They cheat at cards, generally; they welsh at races; they run races on the cross; they forge their fathers' names; they've no principle at all. That is because the swells are not brought up moral, like us. They can't resist temptation, you see, like us, when it comes.'

'What do you think he's done, Charlie?' Vic whispered.

'Forgery, most likely. Very well, suppose it was found out, and they wanted him, how would they set about it?'

'Why, they would advertise for him, I suppose.'

'Just so, just so, Vic. You've exactly hit it, my dear. They would advertise for him. And now listen to this.'

He read the advertisement aloud.

'Good gracious me!' cried his wife. 'It can't be meant for any other man. It can't be. There are surely not two men in the world like that. Oh, my poor Nettie! What-ever in the world will she do?'

'The very first time I saw him,' Charlie continued, 'I said to myself, "This man's a real swell—none of your common mashers." Ever since I've been looking for this. Well, he's had a long rope.'

'Whatever in the world will Nettie do?' asked Vic. 'Charlie, I shall go and see her this minute. Perhaps she hasn't even been warned.'

'Fifty Pounds Reward, Vic! Fifty Pounds Reward! I say, what couldn't we do with fifty pounds?'

Nettie was not at home, nor anybody. The house was quite dark, and no one answered the bell.

'Good gracious!' said Victoria. 'Something's happened already. Do you think he's caught, and sent to prison already? Would they let Nettie and the children into the gaol with him?'

'Fifty Pounds Reward! Vic. If we don't touch that money, someone else will; and we can't do Nettie any harm, because he's certain to be caught. A big man like that has no chance. Shows what a blessed thing it is to be short,' said Charlie, who stood five feet three in his boots. 'I dare say you've often envied Nettie for having such a big husband. Now, you see, he's so big that he can't get away.'

At half-past nine next morning, when the clerks of Mansfield and Westbury's began to arrive, they found a young fellow waiting outside the door, which is on the first floor. He explained that he had come about an advertisement, and he produced the *Star* of the day before. He was told that he could come in and wait till the arrival of Mr. Westbury. That event generally happened a little before ten.

It happened this morning as usual. The young man was asked his name. He said—but nobody believed the statement—that it was 'Concerning-an-advertisement.'

Being shown to Mr. Westbury's private room, he opened the paper and pointed to the advertisement.

'Well, sir?' asked the lawyer.

'I know the house where he lives and the place where he works. Give me the money, and I will give you the information.'

'Not so fast. Who are you, pray?'

'My name is Horatio Patager. I am a clerk in the City.'

He married my sister. That will show you that I ought to know.'

'Well, sir, I am sorry to inform you——'

'Ah! well, I'd rather not learn—don'tcher know?' Horatio interrupted with a blush, which shows that the young man had still left in him a spark of grace. 'I'd rather not have that information. Keep it to yourself. I dessay I shall hear all about it some time or another. Give me the money, and I'll tell you where to find him. It's only a matter of business. I want a few words with a certain gentleman, says you, whose address I happen to have lost. I'll reward anyone who'll take me to that gentleman, says you. Fifty Pounds is the figure, says you. If that's all you want, says I, why, the gentleman is my own brother-in-law. Come along, give me the money, and I'll show you where he lives.'

'Oh!'

'You see, in the City we are all business men. There's no friendship in business. Everybody knows that. A bargain's a bargain. I don't ask what you mean to do with your information.'

'Do you know anything about the previous life of your brother-in-law?'

'No, I don't; but I can pretty well guess,' the young man replied, with a look of so much meaning that the lawyer felt inclined to knock him down off hand. 'Come, sir, I don't ask what you want him for. No doubt,' he grinned, 'it's to give him a little fortune. That's what generally happens when a man is wanted, isn't it?'

'In a word, sir, you have come here with the intention of betraying your own sister's husband! Well, you'll be sorry to learn that you are too late. We know that Mr. George Atheling, otherwise George Humphrey, lives in the Daffodil Road, and we know where that road is. You can go, sir!'

Horatio turned white. Ever since the reading of the advertisement, all through the dark watches of the night, he had been thinking of this glorious windfall. It was already in his grasp: he had his hands upon it. Heavens! What a fling he might have with fifty pounds! And now it was gone!

'You can go,' the lawyer repeated.

'I don't believe you know!' cried the disappointed clerk.

'You won't give the money to me. Yet I'm the first. It's mine by right—you've advertised it—I'll have it too, if there's law in the land!'

'Plenty of law. Plenty of law. Go and look for it. Now, sir.'

The lawyer looked big and threatening. Horatio retired.

About eleven there arrived an elderly gentleman, who requested to see one of the principals, and said he had called about an advertisement.

'Sir,' he said, 'I have many reasons to believe that the person advertised for in last night's *Echo* is my own son-in-law.'

'Indeed. Then you could tell me his place of residence, no doubt.'

'I certainly could. But I should like, first of all, to know what he has done. If it's anything very bad—anything that brings him within the law—you might be merciful enough to let me know, on account of my daughter, poor girl! Her mother has always been of opinion that George has done something, and that he is in hiding. For my own part, I cannot believe otherwise than that he is an honest man.'

'Well, sir?'

'My wife thinks that I ought to give this information, and to claim the reward, because fifty pounds doesn't come in our way every day. But I say—No, not if it is to bring trouble upon my daughter's head. Therefore, sir, if it is trouble, I will withhold the information and go away.'

'Upon my word, sir, I am very sorry that we cannot give you the reward under the circumstances. Unfortunately, you are too late. We know where to find our man.'

'Oh!' Mr. Patager sighed. 'I am glad that the reward will not come to me—though my wife—but you are yourself, perhaps, a married man, sir—and she would have to me it did seem like selling my daughter's husband.'

'Be easy, sir. You shall not sell your son-in-law.'

'Then, sir, if I may ask the—the reason for the advertisement—what my unhappy son-in-law has done—'

'I fear, Mr. Patager, that I cannot, for the moment, inform you. Let it suffice that we know where to find him.'

'Shall you send him up for trial? He has a wife and children: consider—it will be my daughter's ruin!'

'Bless the man!' cried the lawyer. 'Why will you assume that he has done anything? You shall learn—if it is thought fit to tell you—all in good time. Go home, sir, and be easy.'

At half-past one—in the dinner-hour—there appeared a third person, again a young man. He said he called about an advertisement.

'Well, sir,' said Mr. Westbury. 'You know where to lay your hand upon the gentleman for whom we are advertising, I suppose?'

'I do, sir.'

'And you are come to draw the reward?'

'I certainly am—as soon as you have received and proved my intelligence. Not before. I am a man of business. In a Bank.'

'Mr. Atheling's brother, or cousin, or father, I suppose?'

'I married his wife's sister. That is how I know. Well, sir, you want his address. I can give it. I don't ask what he has done, or why you want him.'

'Just so. You are a purely disinterested person, anxious only that justice shall be done, even on your nearest relatives?'

'As for that,' said the virtuous Charles, 'I've got nothing to do with justica. I answer an advertisement.'

'Quite so. Well, sir, your truly honourable purpose is defeated. You can tell your brother-in-law that you wished to sell him, but that you were anticipated.'

'Is it Horatio?' Charles asked anxiously. 'He is quite capable of it. I hope that you will consider, sir. I came here as soon as I could. I submit that half of the reward should be mine—half—things are very tight. My screw is only a hundred and fifty.'

The lawyer pointed to the door.

In the course of the day a great many people came 'about an advertisement.' In fact, it was so easy to spot the man from the description, that everyone who saw the advertisement, and knew George Humphrey by appearance, immediately rushed to the solicitors, in hopes of getting that reward. Thus, the family butcher, the family baker, the family grocer, the family milkman, the family shoemaker,

the policeman, the pew-opener, the proprietor of the *Clerk-land Observer*, the printers of that paper, the office boy—all came and said they wanted fifty pounds for their information. They all said they knew the gentleman, and where he lived. They mostly added that they could guide anybody to the house, so that he could be 'taken up' without trouble. This shows what inferences are drawn when a man is advertised for. And they went away in great sadness when they found they were too late. How seldom comes such a chance!

One has watched the people who stand in front of the proclamation outside police-stations: '*Murder! One Hundred Pounds Reward!*' How eagerly they read the notice! How they yearn and long and pray for the opportunity of betraying some poor wretch to his doom! There are cases on record, I have been told, in which a man, having once gained such a reward, has given up honest work for ever after, and now lives in the hope of getting another; nay, it is said that he will even endeavour to play the part of 'Jonathan Wild,' though in these days of suspicion it is a difficult *métier*. However this may be, there certainly are men who dream continually of getting such a prize, just as there are men who dream of winning a prize in an Austrian Lottery.

Next day there were more applicants—and the day after—and for many days—belated unfortunates who only saw the paper the day after—miserable! thus to miss a chance so rare! As the years roll on and the chance never comes again, many little romances will grow up: it will be told how the fifty-pound prize was missed by an hour, by half an hour, by a quarter of an hour, by ten minutes—five—three—one. By a couple of yards, after a race all the way—by a foot—a neck—a nose! It will be a distinction even to have been beaten by a whole day.

Mr. and Mrs. Patager were in low spirits. Their son-in-law had been advertised for: everybody knew, by this time, the disgraceful fact. There would be but one opinion—he had done something, the nature of which could not be ascertained. He had fled. His wife had gone with him. The advice of the lawyer to keep his mind easy failed to comfort Mr. Patager. How to face the neighbours? How

to stand up in the family-pew with all eyes turned in their direction? How to carry round the plate after the service, conscious that everybody was whispering: 'And his son-in-law has been obliged to fly the country!'

They were alone. Horatio was out, as usual, seeking consolation in his own way.

'We are disgraced,' said the father. 'I suppose it will soon become known in the City. I shall never get over the shame of it.' Mr. Patager is not the only man who thinks that the eyes of the whole City are always watching him with envy and respect. Indeed, it is a wholesome belief: it has led to the foundation of many chantries, chapels, and almshouses and schools, and it keeps many young men straight.

'I always said it. I always said it,' the wife repeated. The confirmation or proof, so to speak, of the prophetic gift is the commonest form of consolation.

'You always did, my dear. We shall remember that. It does your penetration the highest credit. You always said that he'd done something.'

'Something disgraceful, I said.'

'Something disgraceful. Yes, of course, something disgraceful.'

Here the door opened and Victoria appeared.

'Oh! my dear,' her mother groaned. 'Here's an awful thing! However in the world shall we ever get over it? Well, I always said—you remember, Victoria—I always said that he must have committed some dreadful crime.'

'Stuff and rubbish!' replied her daughter unexpectedly. 'Crime, indeed!'

'Why—he's been advertised for!'

'Yes, and I wish they'd advertise for Charlie on the same terms. He went round at dinner-time to inquire about the reward, you know, but of course Horatio had been before him. That boy is capable of any meanness. I suppose he's out now spending the Reward at the music-halls!'

'The disgrace of it!' moaned the elder lady, wringing her hands.

'You and your disgrace!' Vic replied shortly. 'Why, it's money—that's what it is. There's no crime in it—and no shame in it—and no disgrace. You ought to be ashamed to

be so ready with your crimes. I suppose you'll say that Charlie has disgraced himself next?

'Money?' asked the father, because the lady was too astonished to reply.

'They're back again. Now, look, George was at John Carew's last night and he was taken very bad—awful bad. Nettie hurried round there with the children, because he thought he might die. She nursed him all night. He's better this morning, and the lawyers saw him. That's all the story. Now they've come back.'

'Money? How much?'

'I don't know how much. You know Nettie—how close she's always been about her husband. She won't tell me how much. He'd changed his name, and they wanted to know whether he was dead or alive. Disgrace! As if George—our George—could disgrace himself! Mother, I'm ashamed of you—such a suspicion!'

Here was a *volte-face*. It was worthy of a political leader.

'Come, Vic, you've said yourself—a hundred times——'

'No, mother—not that, if you please. I may have heard you say it, and I know my duty, and perhaps I shall have children of my own—but disgrace—with George—George Atheling, gentleman, of Atheling Court—our Nettie's George? And him with money! Mother, I'm ashamed of you, I am!'

CHAPTER XVII.

THE LAST.

'TELL Elinor,' said George, 'that I have taken her at her word. I shall see her again when I can go back to her as I once thought myself—master of myself. And not till then.'

'You are already master of yourself. You proved so much last night,' said the Professor.

'It is not enough to prove it once. I have to prove it again. Yet two months more, and the time will have come round for the next attack.'

'You need have no fear now.'

'Perhaps not. I am partly convinced that the fury of last night's attack, and of every second night, is due to the

yielding of the first night. No. I have little fear. But we shall see. Meantime, Nettie knows all. I have concealed nothing from her. She agrees with me that until I can feel myself really a free man, I have no right to resume my old place. When I can do so, I will return, and bring her with me and the children.'

'Yes. To your old place—your own place—and the old ambitions.'

George shook his head.

'Not the old ambitions. They are gone. They are impossible, henceforth. My career was ruined that first night at Cambridge when, half mad and half asleep, I seized the whisky-bottle. The man who has once been a slave can never afterwards command. The spirit of authority is gone from him. He may become a free man, but never with the old mastership. You know the old galley-slave by the dragging leg. All the rest of my life you will see the dragging leg of the man who has been a slave. Henceforth, the best thing I can hope for is to live retired, and to do no harm to anybody.'

They returned to Daffodil Road.

George repaired as usual to the office of his paper next morning. He was received with universal astonishment. Everybody stared at him. They thought, you see, that he was already arrested and lodged in prison. Except for the actual details of the crime, everything was certain. Yet here he was turning up again as if nothing had happened!

The proprietor beckoned him into his private room. Here he showed him the advertisement.

'Well?' asked George, reading it. 'The advertisement is meant for me. Do you mean that? I have already seen the solicitors about the business. What is the meaning of all this mystery?'

'Why—I thought—it's no use bouncing about it—there's time yet, if you like——' He jerked his left thumb over his left shoulder.

'Oh! you think I was—what is called—wanted.'

'I'm sure you were. Can't think anything else.'

'I suppose not. Fortunately, however, it was not the police who wanted me, you see, but my friends.'

'Oh!' The proprietor's face dropped. 'You are going to stay, after all?'

'For a time—yes.'

The Proprietor's expressive countenance showed the greatest disappointment.

'Ah!' he said. 'It's a dreadful pity. It would have made a splendid bill. Look here. I've had it set up already.' He unrolled a poster, all in red, and all the words in separate lines and big capitals: "'Arrest of the Sub-Editor! Fifty pounds Reward! Attempted Flight! Too late! The Crime! The Perpetrator! The Motive! Alleged Confession! The Ruined Home! The Desolate Hearth! Where is Father? A Weeping Wife!'"

'Dear me!' said George, looking at this work of Art critically. 'What a pity that such a splendid bill should be wasted!'

'A pity, truly. And you look on as if you didn't care twopence!'

'Well, I don't, if you come to that. Do you want me to stop outside and commit a crime or two for the sake of your poster?'

'You may laugh, sir, as much as you like.' The Proprietor turned red. His temper, like his person, was short. 'But let me tell you, sir, that no one in my employ laughs at me. No one, sir. No one!'

'Very well. Then I leave your employment at once.' George put on his hat in token of emancipation. 'Now that I have left it, I suppose you will allow me to laugh at you?'

The Proprietor, fat and puffy, looked up at this great giant and trembled. He remembered that he had never had a Sub-Editor half or quarter so good, and never should get another like him. So he made haste to excuse himself.

'You might make a little allowance, Mr. Humphrey, for my little disappointment. No one knows better than you what a fillip it would have given the paper.'

'So it would—so it would. Well, let us go on again for a bit.' George was placable. He took off his hat, and resumed his usual seat. 'Hand me the scissors and the paste,' he said. 'Pass me the pen and ink. I remain the Sub-Editor.'

In the months of August and September, when even the residents of this quarter manage something of a holiday, except when things are at their very tightest, George con-

tinued at his desk working as before. By tacit consent, the night of the great Conflict was seldom spoken of between his wife and himself. They were to wait for the next battle and its result. After a second decisive victory the future would be considered. Great changes cast their shadows before. Nettie was already conscious that the little house was too little. New wants were already budding in her brain: a higher standard of household expenditure was attained and duly practised.

'Four weeks from to-day, dear,' said George, on the first of September. He referred to the coming struggle.

'You are looking stronger than ever, George. I can see a change in you: your very eyes are stronger.'

'Three weeks from to-day,' he said on the eighth of September.

'If you fought well that night, dear,' she said, 'you will fight ten times as well in three weeks from to-day.'

'Only a fortnight,' he said on the fifteenth.

'The sooner it comes the better, dear. I shall be with you, as I was before, all night long.'

'Only a week now,' he said on the twenty-second.

'That is all, dear. We shall soon have it over now.'

'This evening, dear.' It was the twenty-ninth.

'Go for a walk, George. Take a good long walk. Tire yourself, if you can; and think of nothing but of victory and strength. These great arms—these broad shoulders—what a man you are, George! Never was such a strong man. You were born to be a fighting man, George.'

'You are a flattering Siren. Well, I am a little nervous and a little excited. I will go for that walk, and make it last all day. We will have dinner at half-past seven. After that, we will gird on the armour and wait.'

'Do you think that man will come?'

'I don't know. He has made no sign since July. Let him come, if he likes.'

He went out, and stayed out, walking along the gritty road fifteen measured miles out, and fifteen back again. He came home a little tired, but looking in splendid condition. They talked of other things: the children—trivial things of

the household. But from time to time Nettie glanced at her husband. He grew silent and thoughtful; his face was set. She had seen it so, but harder, more determined, on that night when he made her hold his hands, as if her very touch could give him strength. I verily believe that no act of his had so much endeared him to his wife as that little prayer that she would hold his hand while he went down into the Mouth of Hell.

The evening was dark and cold. The lamp had long been lit: a fire was burning on the hearth: the children were in bed. The pair sat opposite each other—neither speaking.

Suddenly, without any preliminary ringing of the bell or monitory knocker, the door opened noiselessly, and the man Mavis stood before them.

He stood with down-dropped eyes, holding his hat in his two hands, his cheeks paler than ever. He said nothing, not a word.

'George!'—Nettie sprang to her feet, and threw her arms round his neck, 'you shall not go with this man! You shall not!'

'Don't be afraid, my dear. Why do you come here to-night, Mavis?'

'You forget. It is the usual time: I am not here before my time. Business at Boston!'

'Oh, I thought you understood, at the end of last July, that I had given up that job. No more business at Boston for me, Mavis—and no more business with you!'

Mavis took one step into the room.

'I don't think, sir,' he said, becoming the man-servant again, 'that I rightly understand. You are never going to give up that business in Boston! You can't do it, sir. Excuse my speaking before your good lady; but you can't do it. To night the job must be begun. Think of that night aboard ship. Think of last July only. There was a job!'

'It was, Mavis, a devil of a job! Well—I now speak quite plainly. The cottage is held by a yearly tenancy: I shall not renew it. Your service can be determined at a month's notice. Take that notice. There will then be three months' wages due to you.' He got up, took his cheque-book from a drawer and wrote a cheque. 'There they are. You can go. I dismiss you.'

'After five years' faithful service? It's hard!' Mavis began.

'Don't whimper, Mavis. You've had out of me during the last three years the best part of a thousand pounds. I drew a thousand pounds when I came to live here. I have kept myself and my house on my earnings. You've had that thousand pounds. Come now, it's three hundred a year. You must have saved a hundred and fifty a year, at least, out of that. And then there's that cheque of £5,000—a good lump-sum that, Mavis—does you credit—that you got out of me at a certain critical moment, when I did not know what I was doing, yet could do what I was told to do. That was a great stroke, Mavis. That does you great credit, infinite credit. Equalled only by the wise conduct of the voyage.'

'You gave it to me of your own free-will: I'll swear you did!'

'You may swear if you please. I suppose I gave you that second cheque of £5,000 as well: the one you lost, I mean. Now, Mavis, there was a third person present on that occasion, who looked on and overheard everything—a person in the garden, and the window was open. Well! have you got anything more to say?'

Mavis turned to go. He had nothing more to say.

'Stay, Mavis. I am curious to know what you propose to do. You have got, I take it, during these five years, something like six or seven thousand pounds quietly put by.' Mavis smiled. 'You can retire from service. What are you going to do?'

'I shall go back to Cambridge.'

'Not to be a gyp again?'

'No, sir. I did intend going back before, but I was anxious about that second cheque, which you really did give me, but took it away again, I suppose, when I was asleep. I shall go back to Cambridge, and I shall do a little money-lending. The gentlemen are not what they were, neither for drink nor for betting and gambling. But there's still money to be made, and I'm a prudent man, sir, as you could testify.'

'I could, indeed. Farewell, Mavis!'

'I would only wish to say, sir, that if on any future occasion, say to-night or to-morrow night, you want me you have only to send for me. I bear no grudge, sir, for

your changing your mind about the second cheque; and it really was a good lump for gratitude, wasn't it? I can come whenever you send for me; and I can stay as long as you like. On the old terms.'

He was gone. The wife breathed again.

George filled and lit a pipe, which he worked through without a word. Then he spoke.

'There were once, my dear,' he began, 'two boys at school; one was a bully and the other a coward. The bully licked the coward once a week. After a year or two the coward began to feel ashamed. One day he stood up to the bully, and licked *him*. A week later the bully came back and offered battle once more. I shall now, my dear, go upstairs and have it out with that bully.'

At two o'clock in the morning he started from his sleep, panting, gasping, rolling his shoulders.

His wife, who watched beside him, caught his hand.

'George!' she cried. 'George! I am here. Rouse yourself. Remember!'

He opened his eyes and saw her.

'Take my hand,' he murmured. 'The Devil has come again!'

Why—this battle was over in a quarter of an hour. It was nothing compared with the long and doubtful combat of that second night.

'It is gone, my dear,' he said. 'Give me a glass of water. Thank God! I have got the mastery at last!'

He lay back and fell asleep instantly.

There remained the second attack. Again George went out for a long walk—again he came home tired.

'I ought to sleep well to-night,' he said cheerfully. He was in the best of spirits and full of courage. He expected no further trouble at all.

At nine o'clock he took a pipe. Nettie, exhausted with yesterday's watching, began to fall asleep in her chair. He persuaded her to go to bed, promising to awaken her if he was roused by the old symptoms. Alas! she obeyed. She left him alone. Many mistakes had been committed in the management of this case. None so fatal as the last. He presently laid down his pipe. His eyes dropped. He, too, fell asleep. It was then only nine. He slept peacefully in his chair till past eleven.

Then he awoke with a start and sprang to his feet. Once more the old overwhelming wave of a longing, yearning, irresistible thirst seized him. As of old he resisted no longer.

He reeled out of the room, panting—there was no drink: he seized his hat, threw open the door, and ran down the steps. At the garden-gate stood Mavis—faithful creature—waiting. Was he, then, a prophet?

‘I expected you,’ he said. ‘Come, it will take us a quarter of an hour or more. Why didn’t you come yesterday?’

‘You are the Devil himself,’ said George.

They reached the cottage. On the table stood the bottles and the glasses. George fell upon them as he had fallen on them that first night of all. He attempted no resistance. He thought of no resistance. He was once more wholly possessed of that Devil. The man Mavis looked on in silence watching, as a good servant ought to do, without the least emotion.

Ten minutes later the first force of the attack was spent. George sat in the old place, in the arm-chair at the head of the table. He looked around him.

Suddenly he remembered. He thought of Nettie and the children. He leaned his head on his hands. He was as yet only at the beginning of the great surrender. He was still sober, even though he had surrendered. At such a time a simple half-bottle of ardent spirit counts for little. He was sober, and he could think.

‘I have half an hour to spare,’ he said, ‘before it comes again. Perhaps less. Well, I must be quick.’

He drew out his pocket-book and found a post-card. He wrote a few lines on it and addressed it. Then he rose and put on his hat.

‘I am going to post this note,’ he said.

‘Let me post it for you, sir,’ said Mavis respectfully.

‘No; go on mixing the drinks.’

He went out. At the head of the lane he knew there was a pillar-post. He walked up the lane and dropped in his post-card.

‘There,’ he murmured, ‘the thing is as good as done.’

He turned and walked back. But when he reached the gate he stopped.

'Devil!' he said, 'I am going to cheat you at last.'

The lane continues eastward a little when it reaches the river Lea, which is here crossed by one of the many bridges which span it on its southward course.

He leaned over the bridge and looked at the dark water below.

'I knew all along,' he said, 'that the Devil would be too cunning. For Nettie's sake—for the children's sake.' He put one leg over the wall leisurely, and looked down into the dark water. 'The Doctor said that I might kill myself for the sake of someone whom— She will be broken-hearted for a bit. Then she will come round. Besides, there are the boys to look after. And she'll have all that money, if that can console her.' He put the other leg over and sat upon the wall, dangling his feet. His throat began to make itself felt. 'Life,' he said, 'has become impossible. I can no longer surrender, and I cannot fight. Both are impossible. Yet if I had Nettie's hand in mine. . . . No—no—it is impossible.' His throat began to scorch and burn. 'Devil!' he said, 'cold water for you this time!' He leaned forward and rolled over into the river, and sank beneath the waters.

When John Carew came out of his bedroom in the morning, he found on the top of his letters a post-card, with a note in pencil:

'The Cottage. Midnight. The Devil has proved too strong, after all. I always thought he would. For Nettie's sake I am going to put an end to the whole business immediately. I am on my way to drop off the High Bridge into the river Lea, where you will find me to-morrow, I dare say, if you look for me. Ask Elinor, for my sake, to be kind to Nettie and the children.'

'GEORGE.'

Nettie was wandering about the house. She could not sit still—she could not settle to anything. She was filled with the presentiment of coming evil.

She had slept all through the night until eight in the morning. Then she awoke to find that George was already up and dressed. That did not alarm her much at first. But she discovered that his night things were still lying in

their place, neatly folded up, and that his pillow showed no marks of pressure. She hurried downstairs. George was not there. He had not gone to bed at all, then. He was gone out.

Strange! Perhaps he had had a hard night—but he promised faithfully to wake her up—perhaps he had only gone out for a walk. He would come home to breakfast. But he did not. Then her mind began to be filled with vague misgivings—and then with anxieties—and then with terrors.

About twelve o'clock a carriage drew up before the door, and Nettie saw John Carew and a lady get out of it, and observed that John's face was grave and that the lady was weeping. Then her face became white and her heart stood still.

'John Carew!' she cried, springing to meet him, 'where is George? Where is George?'

John Carew took her by both hands.

'Nettie,' he said, 'Nettie, my dear old friend——' but here he broke down. His voice turned into a sob, his eyes overflowed. 'Tell her, Elinor,' he said: 'I cannot.'

He left the room and shut the door.

In the evening the Patager family were gathered together, solemn, awed, and yet important.

'There will be an inquest,' said the Head of it. 'No one knows how he fell in the water. He will be buried—John Carew tells me—in his own church near the family mansion—in his own church—the family mansion'—he repeated. 'It will be in all the papers, of course. They will talk about us in the City.'

'Miss Thanet has carried off Nettie and the children,' said Victoria. 'Poor Nettie! She doesn't even seem to know what is said to her. But,' she sighed, 'seven thousand pounds a year, it is. Oh! seven thousand pounds a year! At such a time one cannot think of money—all our thoughts must be of mourning: we must have it becoming. Mother, you shall have a black velvet and I'll have silk—Nettie will pay—Charlie shall have a new suit of black. Poor Nettie! But, oh! seven thousand—oh!—seven thousand pounds a year!'

THE DOLL'S HOUSE—AND AFTER

SAID Norah Helmer, in that last scene which moved and surprised us all so much, 'We have been married eight years, and we are strangers. I have borne three children—to a stranger. I cannot remain any longer under the roof of a strange man. I will not see these children any more. I give you, Torvald, what I take for myself—perfect freedom. Live as you please—I shall live as I please. We are free. Stranger, keep your children!'

It was twenty years ago when these words were uttered, though we seem to have heard them only yesterday.

I.

It was an upper chamber of a house in one of the poorest parts of the town; a room poorly and scantily furnished. Before the open window stood a table which had certainly once kept richer, if not better, company; there was a cupboard, the half-open door of which showed cups and saucers, and certain household stores; there was no carpet on the floor, the window had no curtain, only a blind; there were no book-shelves, books, pictures, ornaments, or anything pretty at all—nothing but chairs and a table and a stove. One of the chairs was an arm-chair. There was no fire in the stove, because the season was summer. At the table sat a girl at work; and it was the evening, but at nine o'clock; and for that matter at midnight, in Norway, there is still plenty of daylight. From the hot street below came up cries of children at play; puffs and waftings of smells, such varied smells as belong to a poor street where work

of all kinds is carried on in the houses as well as cookery of the kind which appeals as strongly to the nose as to the palate. Overhead, a pure and brilliant sky; an evening when one might long for the pleasant noise of streams leaping over cascades and might dream of the placid waters of the fiord. But the girl went on working.

It was quite fine work that she was doing; work that is generally done in the rooms belonging to the shop where it is sold; but Emmy Helmer liked best to work alone in her own room, and not with other girls; and she was so good a hand that she was allowed to do so. She sat in a chair beside the open window, her skilful needle flying in and out while she made the beautiful embroidered work which the foreign ladies came to buy; so good a hand she was, that the ladies always chose her work and took it home with them and exhibited it as proudly as if they themselves had made it; and so contented a maiden was she that she never asked or cared to know what her employer charged for the work which he got so cheaply. She was a pretty girl—not tall, and yet shapely; the curve of her head and neck, as she sat over the work—nay, every curve in her figure—was lovely to look upon. Her blue eyes, if she lifted them, were soft and limpid; her fair hair was abundant; her hands were small and white; her features were delicate; her cheek soft, though too pale, for the Norwegian winter is long and the Norwegian stove is hot; besides which, a more generous diet and a life of more open air and less hard work might have brought more fulness and a deeper colour to the cheek as well as more roundness to the arm; but in every other respect she was a pretty girl.

On the table there lay an open letter, placed as the London clerk likes to place his newspaper while he takes his dinner, convenient for reading. It was a letter of two pages only, and those not quite filled. It began, 'My dearest, and sweetest and best,' and it ended with, 'Your faithful and constant lover;' and there was hardly anything in it but 'I love you—oh, my love, I love you!' Some girls would have found a letter monotonous with but one idea in it, and that repeated so many times. Not so Emmy Helmer; she thought it beautiful. She knew it by heart, but she read it over and over again; nay, while she sat and

worked, turning her eyes fondly to this letter, looking at each word as if she loved its shape and admired its curves, her cheek began to glow and her eyes grew brighter, and her lips trembled with a dream that came to her—a dream of love and happiness ineffable, far from the place where she was living, far from all the troubles which surrounded her, with this young man who loved her so—who loved her so. Why did he love her so? What was she that such a brave and gallant lover should stoop to love her. Only a work-girl, with a terrible trouble in her family history. But—And he minded nothing—nothing. No, though his father was now a great gentleman in the town, and the mayor, and she was only a work-girl! He minded nothing, not even— She turned pale, and shuddered, and then red, and trembled. He minded nothing, not even—she looked at a door which opened, not to the staircase, but to another room—not even what was behind that door. Behind that door! Her lover knew everything. The poor girl could not conceal anything if she tried: he knew even worse things than any hidden behind that door.

Alas, the most miserable thing that can happen to any one in the world had befallen this poor girl! She was shamed and disgraced; by no misconduct of her own, but by that of other people. She was one of those by whom the fifth commandment, which by some is held to include brothers and sisters, nay, cousins and nephews, nieces, uncles and aunts, cannot possibly be observed—not by the most straight-walking Puritan that ever lived. It cannot: in no way can it be observed. This kind of shame is so horrible because it is, for the most part, self-inflicted. People say behind a girl's back, 'She is the daughter of this, that, or the other shameful person.' They do not say it to her face. If she is a girl of ill-conditions, they say it is the bad blood breaking out. If she is a good girl, they pity her out of the goodness of their hearts. In neither case do they taunt her with her misfortune; she takes the shame herself; with her own hand she dyes her cheek a perpetual red; she need not, but yet she cannot choose. This, as you will understand, was Emmy Helmer's sad case. Then, since in every kind of misery there are some forms more wretched than others, this poor girl had endured the worst kind of all, which comes with the gradual

degradation of those whom she ought to have respected, and the gradual loss of everything which makes this life tolerable. Now, there was nothing left to lose, except those who had wrought the ruin; nay, though this must not be said *in extremis*, when things are at their most shameful point, the extinction of these shameful persons would have been her gain. At least they would no longer be in evidence; they would speedily be forgotten—she would be left alone, a wreck perhaps, but no longer encumbered by the cordage and floating spars, and the crazy hulk of foundering ships around her. But this, again, must not be said even when things are at their worst.

A church-clock struck nine. Emmy threw down her work and sprang to her feet. Then she remembered that she had eaten nothing since mid-day. She searched in the cupboard and found the loaf and some jam. Five minutes' struggle of youth with bread-and-jam may represent a light and wholesome supper. Then she put her work together, and carried it into her own room, and shut the door. When she came out, ten minutes later—not more, fair reader—she had on her other frock—a greatly superior article to that in which she worked. She wore a pretty hat, with pink ribbons tied in a lovely bow at her throat; and with a smile on her lips and a light in her eyes, she ran out of the door which opened on the landing, and so downstairs.

II.

BEHIND the door—that other door—if Emmy had stayed any longer she would have heard steps as of one staggering about the floor. Then she would have jumped from her chair and run into her own room, there to remain until she was called. It was in this way that she did her best to honour her parent.

The door was opened roughly, as by one who uses violence, and Torvald Helmer, her father, stood in the doorway, looking about him stupidly, as one not yet more than half awake. He had changed a little, certainly, since that day when Norah, his wife, amazed him by telling him he was a stranger just before she left him. Then he was three-and-

thirty years of age, well set up, stiff in his carriage, precise in his dress, clean-shaven, of personal dignity beyond his years, and careful of his words. Everybody remembers how Torvald Helmer looked twenty years ago, before—well, twenty years bring a man of thirty-three to the age of fifty-three. This seems incredible to those still at the former desirable age, but it is really quite true. Now, at fifty-three most men show signs of advancing years, as in growing gray or bald, and, perhaps, in being not quite so ready to stoop as in the old days. And at fifty-three men who have lived a certain kind of life are rewarded by possessing a historical face. Their eyes, for instance, swell out for fatness; their throats are swollen and their cheeks are puffed; their lips tremble, as well as their hands; round the mouth the years (and that habit of life) have carved a circular moat or ditch. There are faces truly historical: all the world can read them. There are many other faces which at fifty-three proclaim the habit of life, though not so plainly. This one will do for our purpose, because it was the face which Torvald Helmer showed when he awoke that evening from a sleep, untimely, unwholesome, and, in any other man, disgraceful. In his it was too common to bring disgrace. And at the sight of him, so shabby, so shaky, his gray hairs so disreputable, you would have asked where was the Torvald you remembered twenty years ago. No greater misery for such a man than, in some sober moment, to remember what he once was. How—oh! how—shall such a man climb back again? How, at fifty-three, shall he regain the old look of dignity and self-reliance? He never tries; he groans and curses; and he still wallows in his habit.

Torvald came out blearing and blinking; he looked all round the room; it was empty; he drew the armchair to the window, and sat, leaning his head upon his hands, waiting for the moment of full recovery. To such as drink continuously this moment soon comes; it is part of the habit of their life to wait and expect this moment; they know when it is coming; then they begin to straighten themselves; the immediate effect of the strong drink has gone away, and they become thirsty again. This man had slept for four hours; he was awake now and growing sober rapidly; he sat at the window and suffered the air to play

on his bare head, while his eyes blinked and his shoulders rolled as a ship in waters troubled by a recent storm.

Presently he lifted his head, completely steadied—he was as sober as he ever was; in this kind of life there is reached a certain level on which the pilgrim is never sober. Every day he is drunk, but he is never quite sober. Torvald Helmer was on this level. It is pretty low down among levels, but there is one below it, and then—the final plunge.

He got up and looked round the room, conscious that it was growing late in the evening, and that he was alone. He knocked at his daughter's door, calling her, but there was no reply. Then he sat down again at the open window; the night was warm; but the children's voices had ceased—they were in bed; and there were no longer smells of work and cookery. He sat a while thinking in the disconnected, jumbled way which was left to him—to him, who had once governed and trained his thoughts to obedience and orderly sequence.

Then, as if stung by some noisome creature, he sprang from the chair and began to walk about the room.

'Curse her!' he murmured, 'curse her! She is back again. I saw her this afternoon, and she saw me. I was coming out of the Black Eagle, and she was in her carriage—in her carriage—looking sleek and wealthy. And she laughed—oh, Devil!—she laughed!'

He opened the cupboard; there was a bottle in it, but he knew it was empty. He felt in his pockets, but he knew there was no money in them; and he was fain to sit down again and groan while his unruly thoughts went their own way and took him back again for a space of twenty years.

'I have borne three children—to a strange man; I can no longer remain under the roof—of a strange man. Take your freedom, Torvald, as I take mine.'

These words came back clear and strong across the gulf of twenty years. Then he saw how the household, which had been his joy and pride, so full of comfort, order and sweetness, fell to pieces; how there ceased to be any order; how his servants robbed him; how his children were neglected; and how he himself came home at night to gloom and discomfort. He remembered how the people talked, and many looked askance at him, saying that no woman

would leave husband and children who was treated with kindness and love—the thing was impossible on the face of it. How at the bank the customers who were wont to consult him freely and with confidence now confined themselves to their business and went away. How he fell out of society; people recognise a bachelor and a widower, but one who is neither, what can they do for him? All the misery of this early time came back to him. He remembered what he suffered in his loneliness, he who had been accustomed for eight years to the company of a sweet and loving wife—sweet and loving until the very moment before she left him. And at this point he cursed the woman again.

Then he remembered how he would sit alone in his study all the evening, caring no more for work, though still from habit he brought home his papers. And now, beside him, close at his elbow, a bottle.

He remembered, next, how one day the chairman of the bank called with a very serious face, and communicated to him the resolution of the directors to dismiss him from the post of manager in consequence of work neglected and business falling off. Well, he was still a lawyer; he would practise. He had continued to practise, to such as would come, but who were they? And what was he now? And again he cursed the woman.

He was so sober now that he was beginning to recover an unwonted command of his brain. He was beginning to understand how low he had fallen; a man can fall no lower than from honour to contempt, from self-respect and self-rule to slavery and loss of will. Happily for such as Torvald they seldom quite understand what they have been and what they are. He shed tears; he wept; he groaned aloud; the tears rolled down his cheeks. Such as Torvald weep easily, yet they continue in the bonds of habit. We all weep when the man brings along the whip. Those, however, who resemble the unfortunate Torvald Helmer are more than commonly open to the soft emotions of sorrows. Therefore this poor man shed abundant tears.

He was still weeping over the past and growing thirstier every moment, when he heard steps upon the stairs. He knew those steps; he lifted his head, he opened his mouth, and gasped as one who in the desert sees the palm-trees that grow beside the spring. They were the steps of his

son Einar, if he guessed aright. Then the door was opened and Einar came in.

Twenty years ago, when you saw Einar last, he was a lovely boy of seven, the image of his mother, with all her winning ways and sweet confidences. He was now a man of seven-and-twenty, past the first spring of manhood, at an age when the face and manner of the man begin to show something of his past. He was handsome, but there was a look of recklessness in his face, and just now his cheek was flushed and his eyes glistened. He was dressed like a clerk, but he lacked the air of sobriety which should adorn that calling. A clerk who looks as if the costume of a cavalry officer would become him better than his black coat and gray trousers does not inspire confidence. In fact, Einar had already gone through several situations, and was now employed in keeping the books—without access to the cash—of a beer garden.

'All alone, dad?' he said, drawing a large flat bottle out of the paper in which it was wrapped. 'Here is something to cheer you up'—it was not the first time he had found his parent in tears. 'Have a glass, and look cheerful.'

He filled and lit his pipe, put glasses on the table, and sat down opposite his father, who drank glass after glass of raw spirit with the greediness of the toper who has let himself run down.

'Dad,' said the son presently, 'she's back in town again.'

'I know; I saw her this afternoon.'

'I saw her too, driving through the streets. She's dressed in silks and satins. The people looked at me. If anyone had dared to speak to me I'd have killed him.'

His father said nothing.

'I'd have killed him,' the young man repeated.

Torvald swallowed another glass. Einar puffed at his pipe. They exchanged no more words.

III.

OUTSIDE the town, where a swift stream ran babbling over the stones, two lovers walked hand-in-hand. The young man was Nils Krogsrad—Nils the younger.

'Oh, my dear,' he said, 'I am torn to pieces thinking of

you. But patience—patience—we will go away, far away, where you shall see and hear no more.'

'If I could do anything for them, Nils—but I cannot. Einar loses every place through his tempers and his drinking, and Robert terrifies me with his extravagance. Where does he get his money? Is it by gambling? I cannot bear to think of him—and—there is—my poor father!'

'Yes,' said Nils decidedly.

'He who stood so high, and was respected so much. Why, Nils, all the world knows what Torvald Helmer was—and all know what he is,' she added bitterly.

'My dear, there is no help for us but to fly. We must go away—I have thought of everything. We will go to America—not to the place where the Norwegians congregate—there we should find nothing but this town over again, with all the old stories—no, no—we must go to some place by ourselves, and quickly learn to talk English, and bring up our children—our children, dear'—he repeated the words, so strange to lovers young—'as if their parents were of the English race—not Norwegians.'

'Oh, Nils! will your father let you go?'

'He must, if I refuse to stay,' replied the young man firmly. 'I shall speak to him to-morrow.'

'But if he should not?'

'My dear, I shall ask him for nothing more than his consent, and the money for our passage and our start. That done, we shall find between us all the rest.'

'Yes, dear Nils—I am not afraid of work. And if only I have you, I care not how hardly we live.'

He took her in his arms and kissed her again and again.

It was eleven o'clock when they walked home together. There were still many people in the streets, for why should one want to go to bed when the air is warm and sweet, and the night is like the day? They looked after the lovers, and one said to the other that it would be a good thing for the girl to be taken from her father and her brothers; and the other (who was a moralist) remarked to the one, That from brambles one does not gather grapes, and that the daughter of such a father, and such a mother, is not likely to advance the coming of the kingdom of Heaven.

At the door they kissed again and parted.

The girl ran upstairs. She found her father sitting in the

armchair, his head against the wall, breathing heavily. Alas! How often had she seen him so! Her brother, not so far gone, turned his head and tried to speak, but only grunted.

Emmy went quickly into her own room.

There she fell upon her knees and burst into tears of gratitude because God would permit her to be taken away from this house of shame—far away from the town of shameful memories.

There was still another member of the family. This was the youngest—Robert. He came home at midnight. He, too, was a clerk, and he had not yet lost his situation, which was in the bank of which his father had once been manager. He was dressed as one who desires to be thought a young gentleman of fashion and means; he wore the latest cut of collar and necktie, carried a gold chain, and had a ring on his finger. His face, however, was anxious. He glanced at his father and his brother and hurried through, like Emmy, to his own room. Here he did not, like her, fall on his knees in prayer, and then lie down to sleep. On the contrary, he was full of restlessness. He half undressed, and then started, gasped, and dressed himself again. Then he wrote something on a paper and looked at it. Then he tore it up, undressed for the second time and lay down. But he could not sleep. And so the household of Torvald Helmer passed the night. Two of them in the dreamless sleep of drunkenness, one tossing on his bed in terror of something, the last sleeping in happy hope of being taken speedily away. Alas! Torvald Helmer—how hast thou fallen!

IV.

NORAH sat alone in her salon. Twenty years had changed the young wife of twenty-seven to the woman of forty-seven. At that age few women preserve their attractions. Norah was one of the few. She was now a handsome woman, who had been in her youth only pretty. Her form had filled out, her face was still pleasing, her eyes, once so vivacious and sparkling, though a little dulled by the years, were still full of light. She was dressed in black silk, with plenty of lace; she lay back in her easy-chair; in her lap was a book which

she was not reading. As she sat there alone—thinking—her face grew hard, and even defiant.

Well, she had had her way. She gave up her husband and home; she abandoned her children; she went forth to find—Herself. She found something, and she called it Herself. This something, which she readily believed, told her that religion was sheer imposture and pretence; that the ordinary laws of life were designed for no other purpose than to keep women in slavery; that the first duty of every woman was owed to that something—Herself; that she must make the most of her life for the sake of that something, before whom every other consideration must give place. She threw aside, therefore, all the conventions, and openly, not secretly, in the sight of all, she began to live the life of perfect freedom. She wrote novels also, which the old-fashioned regarded with horror. In them she advocated the great principle of abolishing the family, and making love the sole rule of conduct. She even related in these works her own adventures, insomuch that the worthy Norwegians thought the curse of Paris was about to fall also upon fair Norway.

It is rumoured that this advanced thinker has found many disciples, most of whom, for the sake of their business connections, worship in secret. It is certain that a few ladies—English or German—have been found in her salon on her evenings, as well as the men who, partly out of curiosity, and partly from the freedom and the piquancy of the conversation, frequented her receptions. Indeed, Norah Helmer commanded the hand of respect which belongs to one who has the courage to act upon her convictions. Perhaps it would have been kinder to her own children—but what had children to do with the discovery and the development of Herself?—had she practised her convictions in some other place, say in St. Petersburg, where everything is permitted; or in Paris, where everything is done; or in London, where everything may be done and nothing need be known. Women, however, who are brilliant in the society of men, who permit themselves to say things which would be risky in a club smoking-room, and who hold views which prevent the poor conventional lady from calling upon them, are apt to run down and feel low when they have the whole evening in solitude. Norah was feeling low; she was alone; her book

was stupid; she wanted excitement; she was sorry now that she had refused a box at the theatre.

'A lady, madame.'

'A lady! What lady?—What name?'

'Only a lady, madame. The lady wishes to give you her name herself.'

Norah hesitated. 'I am at home,' she said.

The lady who came in was dressed in a long cloak with a thick veil. She put up the veil and threw off her cloak.

'You do not remember me,' she said.

Norah looked at her curiously. 'You are Christine,' she said. 'I remember you now. Why do you come here,' she asked coldly, 'after twenty years' absence?'

'I come to see you, Norah. It is your own fault that now I only dare to come secretly.'

'I am a leper, I suppose.'

'You know what people say and think of you. You know what things you have written and published.'

'Well, in the world's own way of thinking—if I am what I am, you are the wife of Nils Krogstad.'

'My husband is long since a most respectable man. It is known that for a short period he was slandered and misunderstood. When I married him it was my intention to restore him to society—nay, to place society at his feet. He is now honoured: the mayor of the town, the manager of the bank, the leader in every religious and philanthropic effort.'

Norah laughed derisively. 'Yes, indeed; but why do you come here?'

'I come, I say, to see you. I heard that you had returned, after five years' absence. We are growing old, Norah. I have followed the course common to the world we live in; you have chosen another path. Which is now the happier?'

'Certainly, I am the happier, because I am not a slave. I am not concerned to defend my life, Christine. It is enough for me to have found myself, and to have followed logically and fearlessly the full development of my nature.'

'Do you never regret the past?'

'Do you mean that chapter which I closed twenty years ago?—Never.'

'Do you never think of your husband?'

'The owner of the Doll's House?—Never!'

'Nor of your children?'

'I never so much as inquire if they are living or dead.'

'They are living. Your husband, Torvald Helmer, has sunk very low.'

'So much I have heard. But, indeed, I care not.'

'That is not well said, Norah, that you care not. For it is your doing—all your doing. When you left him suddenly with the helpless children you destroyed his life. Did you never ask yourself what it meant for such a man to be deserted by his wife, and without a cause?'

'Cause there was—and enough.'

'Without a cause,' Christine repeated. 'You told me why you left him. There was no cause. Did you never think what construction would be put upon your act? People look coldly on a man whose wife suddenly leaves him and returns to him no more.'

'I cannot help that.'

'You have not only destroyed his life, Norah, but you have destroyed the lives of your own children. You remember their names, at least. There was Einar, the eldest. You must remember that lovely boy. He is now a drunken profligate. He has been made reckless by the example of his father and the things said of his mother. There was little Emmy—you must remember her. She is a good girl, I am told, who lives apart and alone, condemned to loneliness, because a girl with such sad parents can have no friends. There is the youngest, Robert, whose way of life is well known, and whose end is certain. It will be—the prison. Does this move you?'

'Not in the least,' she replied coldly. 'You speak of unknown people—strangers. The sins of strange people are only interesting as forming data in the general problems of humanity. I have told you that a certain chapter of my life is closed for ever.'

Madame Krogerad put on her cloak and lowered her veil.

'I leave you,' she said. 'You say in your books that you have found perfect happiness in the development of yourself in your own way. Sometimes in your happiness and your pleasures, think of the ruined home and the lost children. Norah, no woman ever did a more cruel, a more

wicked, or a more selfish thing than you, when you deserted your husband and your children.'

Norah laughed scornfully.

When the door closed upon her visitor her laughter ceased, her face changed, she sank upon a chair—a long-forgotten yearning seized her and held her. She had been reminded of her children. For twenty years she had forgotten them; now she remembered them all again—the sturdy Einar, the laughing Emmy, the little year-old boy. Her heart went out to them. What was it that woman said? They were grown up; and one was a drunken profligate, and one was friendless for no sins of her own, and one was fast nearing the gates of the gaol.

'I am sorry,' she said, 'that I came back to the place. Five years ago I said I would never come back. I will go away to-morrow, out of their way. They are no children of mine; they are the children of the man, the man—the strange man!'

V.

EMMY HELMER sat at her work next day. She was singing as she worked; not a song, but a piece of this song and of that, without thinking what she sang; singing out of the happiness of her heart, because her lover was going to take her away, far away, where the shameful ness that now wrapped her, as with a garment, would drop from her and be no more seen. A girl situated like Emmy Helmer may be allowed, I suppose, to think that the best thing possible for her would be to go right away from home and never to see again her father or her brothers, and never again to hear of her mother. As for her father, he had gone as usual to the office, where he sometimes received the few who still came to him; simple folk who had known him and consulted him so long, and could not understand that his brain was muddled with strong drink. Her elder brother was also gone—in search of a new place, I dare say; and the younger brother was at his desk in the bank. She knew not how soon it would be before Nils, her lover, would take her away, but very soon now—oh, very soon! Therefore she sang at her work. In the hot forenoon the

house was quiet: nobody ever disturbed her—nobody ever visited her; and she worked on, singing as she worked in a low sweet voice, thinking nothing of her words, but dreaming of her handsome lover, Nils Krogstad's youngest son. Oh, it was too great fortune—and so grand a family! One of the sons was a professor in the university, another was a lawyer, a third was an officer of engineers; but Nils, the youngest, her lover, would not stay at home; he would go to America and become a farmer, and she would go with him and become a farmer's wife; and, what was it he said?—their children, oh, their children! would be brought up to talk English, and so never learn the truth about their mother's family.

Suddenly—she never noticed steps going up and down stairs; people in flats regard them no more than steps in the street—her door-bell rang. She rose, astonished. At the door stood a lady whom she knew not—a lady beautifully dressed in silk, with a thick veil.

'Are you Emmy Helmer?' asked her visitor. 'Yes? You are alone? Then I will come in.' She stepped inside, and looked around curiously. Then she looked at the girl. 'You are Emmy Helmer,' she said again, with a strange constraint in her voice. 'You are a work-girl. Your father, where is he? And your brothers?' She lifted her veil. 'Do you know who I am?'

'My father is at his office.' Emmy answered all the questions. 'My brothers are at their work. I do not know you, madame. Have you business with me?'

'Your father drinks, I believe; and your elder brother, Einar, follows his example.'

The girl hung her head.

'Alas, madame!' she said, 'these things are too well known; I cannot deny them. Are you come only to tell me this?'

'No—no—you—Emmy Helmer—tell me—are you happy? Do you want anything?'

'Not now. At last I have all that I want.'

'Here? In this poor place? With your father and your brothers always in your sight?'

'I have all that I want, madame.'

'In Heaven's name what do you want?'

The girl looked round, and made answer slowly:

'I want to be taken away from a town where I am shamed by my mother, and pitied for my father. That is all I want. But God has given me more.'

'Your mother—shamed by your mother! Do you remember her? Have you seen her?'

'No, madame; I pray that I may never know her. She is the cause of all our troubles. It is a shameful thing to be ashamed of your own mother. It is a most miserable thing not to be able even to think of her for fear of bad and revengeful thoughts.'

'If your mother were to seek you out, child, what would you say to her?'

'I should run away lest I should say something wicked. But who are you, madame, and why do you come here?'

'I was sent, child—sent by your mother—none other—to see you. Since you have all that you want, and since you—think about her—in this way—I will not stay—I will go away—I will go away.' She turned and seemed as if she were going—yet she lingered. 'Nay,' she said, with a strange look in her eyes; 'of course you speak as you are told to speak. You do not know the truth. Your mother is a great leader. Future ages will speak of her as among the first of those who liberated woman from the yoke laid upon her by all the ages. You cannot know. Child, your mother makes you an offer. Come to her. I will take you. Live with her; be her daughter and her pupil. She will teach you to become even as she is herself—free in thought and free in life.'

'Oh!' The girl shuddered and trembled. 'If Nils should hear! Live with her? Give up my lover and my hopes? Oh! you are a vile and wicked woman! You are as vile and wicked as my unhappy mother herself! Go—quickly. Leave me—lest I say something worse.'

Her mysterious visitor obeyed. She turned and walked away.

VI.

THE girl sat down to her work again. But her hands trembled, the work went slowly, and she sang no more. The joy had gone out of her heart. Her mother! Her mother who had shamed her! Oh! unto the third and

fourth generation! Never, since she began to understand at all, had she ceased to feel those dreadful words—'unto the third and fourth generation.' She tried to think of her lover—brave, and strong, and true. But she could not. She was in the ruined home cursed by the sins of her parents! The work went more slowly; the tears gathered in her eyes and rolled down her cheeks—'unto the third and fourth generation.' Alas! As yet she knew not the trouble that was to fall upon her.

Presently she recovered a little, and went on more steadily with her work. But another step came up the stairs—a step that she knew—and stopped before the door.

It was her younger brother. He was perfectly white; he trembled and shook; he looked about the room. 'Emmy,' he cried, 'help me—I must run away. Give me all the money you have. Oh! they may be after me now.'

'Robert! what have you done? What is the matter?'

He went into his own room and began putting his things together as fast as he could.

'There's a row at the bank,' he said. 'I knew it would be found out. Oh, I was a fool not to run away yesterday—the day before! Emmy, how much money have you got?' She gave him her purse. It was light, but it held all she had.

'Where will you go? Oh, Robert, what have you done?'

'I will get across to Copenhagen; I will go on to Bremen and so to New York.'

'What have you done?' she asked again.

'You'll find out quick enough. Give me those boots, and my great-coat. Hush! There's someone at the door. Don't let him in! No—no—that would make him suspect. Let him in.' There was a ring at the bell. 'Let him in. I will lock my door; if he tries to get in I will escape by the roof.'

He pushed his sister out of his room and locked the door. Emmy opened the door trembling. It was not, however, a policeman who stood there, but Mr. Nils Krogsrad, the great banker, the mayor of the town, the father of her lover.

'You are Emmy Helmer?' he said. 'I thought so. I have something to say; something important—deeply important.'

He came in and sat down. He was a tall man, of grave and dignified bearing. The period during which he suffered under the misunderstanding of the town had, perhaps, saddened him.

'My child,' he said, 'I desire you to understand, first of all, that in what I have to say I mean no blame against yourself. I am happy to learn that you bear a character irreproachable. I am, therefore, assured that you will receive my—my communication in a proper spirit.' He paused. The girl said nothing. 'It is,' he continued, 'a law of humanity that we suffer together. In every family the deeds of the parents act upon the lives and fortunes of the children. We who are virtuous bequeath an inheritance of honour to our children. Those who are—the opposite—bequeath an inheritance of shame. Is this true?'

Emmy Helmer bowed her head. She could not speak; and her brother was in the next room, hiding from the pursuit of the law: an inheritance of shame, truly.

'I have four sons, Emmy Helmer. The eldest is a professor at the university, in great esteem; the second is a lawyer, in good practice; the third is an officer of engineers, honourably considered; the fourth, Nils, it is my intention to keep in the bank, in order to follow my footsteps. I am aware that he has wild ideas about America, but they are not my ideas. I am also aware that he has permitted himself to fall in love with a girl. She is virtuous and respectable, it is true; but for family reasons—for family reasons, I say——' Again he paused, but the girl remained silent. 'Emmy Helmer, I ask you, could I permit my son to marry that girl? Think of it. Must I remind you of her family? You are a good and sensible girl—think of it. Is it possible that I could suffer my son to load his back with such a family?—father, mother, brothers—good heavens! Is it possible? You know my reputation in the town—my honourable position; as magistrate I might have to condemn——' He paused again.

Emmy Helmer covered her face with her hands, sobbing.

Nils Krogsrad rose: 'I have said enough for a sensible girl. I have sent my son away for a year or more to learn his business. Now, there is another thing. Your brother Robert, whom I took into the bank as a junior clerk—weakly, as knowing his father's character—has, I find, com-

mitted an act which brings him within the arm of the law. He has forged my name. The amount is small, but the crime is great. I would not willingly press the charge; but, can my son marry the sister of a forger, the daughter of—nay, nay, let us spare the rest. Think of it, Emmy Helmer. You are greatly to be pitied, but this affliction is your inheritance. Think, I say. Give me an assurance that this foolish engagement is broken, and, as a first mark of my gratitude, your brother shall be suffered to escape.'

The girl rose, and brushed back her tears. 'You are right,' she said. 'Nils shall not marry me. Give him his ring.' She drew from her finger the ring her lover had given her. 'Are you satisfied, Mr. Krogsrad?'

'I am quite satisfied. You are a good and brave girl. In heaven, Emmy Helmer, you will have your reward.'

He went away. The girl called her brother.

'You can come out, Robert,' she said calmly—'you can come out without fear. Mr. Krogsrad has been here. He has told me that you are a forger, but he will suffer you to escape. Go quickly. Oh, Robert!'—she laid her hands upon his shoulders—'go away to some foreign country, where no one knows you. And, Robert, for fear it should be found out—never, never, never marry! For GOD'S sake, never marry. Let your sins die with you. Spare the children—oh, my brother, spare the children!'

VII.

THAT evening, about eight o'clock, Norah drove to the railway station. She was leaving her native town for ever; she would return to it no more. Of old, she had been pleased to come and go, scornful of the hostile looks of the women and the side-glances of the men. She delighted in her isolation; it was that of one in advance of her generation; one who is wiser than the recognised leaders is naturally stoned. She showed an example of perfect freedom and fearless development, without any prejudice left at all. Now she was going away for the last time, she would never come back. Besides, she was humiliated; she thought her-

self so strong that nothing connected with the closed chapter could touch her any more ; and she had seen her daughter ; the old, buried, long-forgotten yearnings seized her ; the old, long-forgotten prejudices made her as ashamed as Eve herself ; and horrible doubts held her sleepless and wretched all the night. She would go away at once—she would go to Paris, to London—anywhere.

On the way to the station, where the street leads up from the port, the driver stopped. Blocking her way there was passing slowly a little procession.

'They are carrying something, madame,' said the driver. 'We shall be able to go on directly.'

Norah leaned forward with natural curiosity. Four men were carrying something. What ? They were surrounded by twenty or thirty people pressing in to see. All were talking eagerly. Then she heard the name of her husband mentioned.

'Torvald Helmer. Go and call Torvald Helmer. He must be told. Go, someone, and tell Torvald Helmer. He is drinking at the Black Eagle.'

They put down their burden in front of the carriage. them ?

'Drive on,' said Norah. 'Cannot you get round
'There is no hurry, madame,' said the driver. 'They will go on directly. I think it is someone who is drowned.'

Norah lay back. A dreadful presentiment of evil seized her ; she was afraid. For twenty years she had not felt the least touch of repentance or fear ; now, she was afraid, and she knew not why.

She heard them talking. 'Here comes Torvald Helmer. Here is Einar. Oh, shameful ! They are both drunk ! And at such a moment !'

She sat up again and saw her husband, and he was staggering along—drunk. Behind him, also drunk, a young man, tall and handsome. Was this her eldest boy ? Was this Einar ?

A lady in the crowd saw her and came out quickly to speak with her. It was Christine Krogsrad.

'Norah,' she said, 'for God's sake, drive on quickly !'

'What does it mean ?' she asked. 'Why are they calling Torvald Helmer ?'

'Do not ask. Do not seek to know. Drive on quickly.' Christine was deeply moved. 'A dreadful thing has happened.'

'I shall not move until I learn what it is.'

'Then—oh! wretched woman—know that the ruin is complete.'

'What ruin?'

'The ruin wrought by your own hand. They are bearing home the body of your daughter. She has drowned herself. For her mother's sake—for her father's sake—she has been robbed of her lover. She is dead.'

'Ah!' Norah sank back in her carriage; but she recovered herself with an effort.

Just then her husband, who was stupidly gazing at his daughter's corpse, looked up, and, drunk as he was, recognised her. He bellowed an execration, and would have run at her, waving his arms, and cursing her, but the others held him back. They knew by this time who was in the carriage, and the crowd parted right and left, as if to suffer the woman who had deserted her children and her husband to gaze upon the dead face of her daughter. But no one reproached her, save with looks. Emmy lay upon a bier formed by the coats of the fishermen who had found her; someone had arranged her long fair hair across her bosom; her hands were joined as if in prayer; her cheek was white and waxen, in no way injured by the water; her eyes were closed, the long lashes lying on the cheek; her face was at rest, and for ever.

As the mother looked, her colour came and went; the tears rose in her eyes, but she repressed them; she reeled and trembled, but she steadied herself; she parted her lips twice to speak, but twice she refrained. In a word, Norah Helmer, the apostle of the new and better creed, was threatened with some of the weakness of the ordinary woman; for a moment she was almost capable of weeping over her daughter; but she was mistress of herself; she rose to the occasion; she became perfectly cold and indifferent.

'What have I to do,' she asked, 'with a strange man and his dead child?'

'Norah,' said Christine, 'you will never—never—never—'

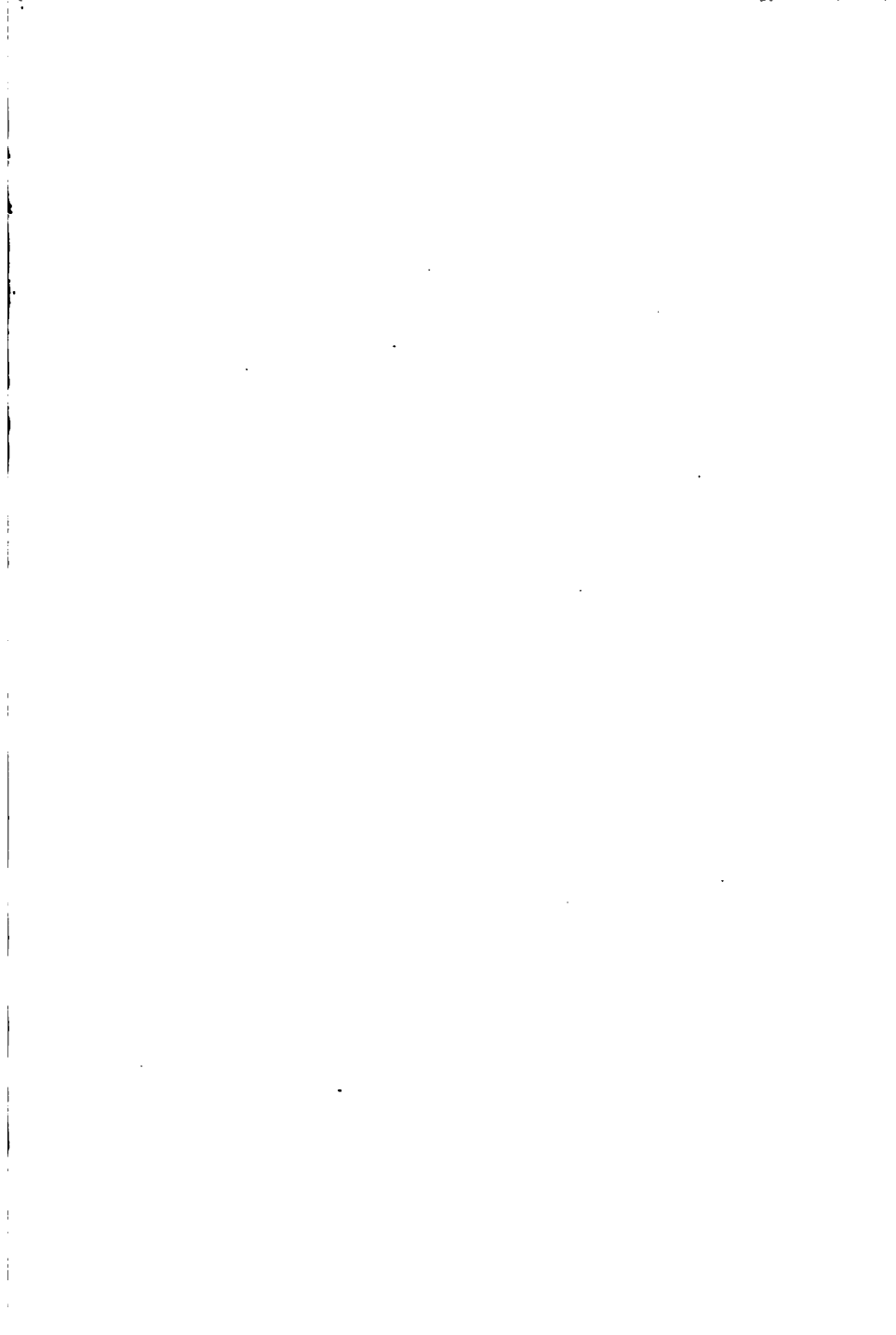
forget this scene. Go! you will be haunted for ever with the destruction of your own children by your own hand.'

'They are going on, madame,' said the driver, turning in his seat. 'It seems that it is a poor girl who has drowned herself for shame. She had a bad mother and a bad father. It is sad. Madame will be in time to catch her train.'

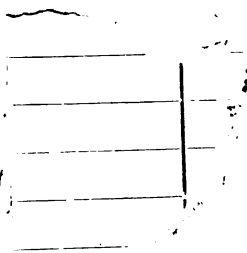
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